MIDSHIPMAN WICKHAM

By RALPH D. PAINE

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He flopped down and was able to catch hold of the machinist by the shoulders (*page* 185)

MIDSHIPMAN WICKHAM

BY

RALPH D. PAINE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1926

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The Riverside Press

CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

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MIDSHIPMAN WICKHAM

CHAPTER I

A MIDSHIPMAN WITH A FLAW

It was more like home than any other place he knew. After long service with a destroyer division in the midst of the weltering miseries and hatreds of the Near East, Lieutenant Commander David Magowan had been ordered to the Naval Academy at Annapolis for shore duty as one of the staff of instructors. His own four years as a midshipman had begun to seem rather distant, although he still rated himself as a fairly young man. In the bachelors' mess of the Officers' Club he found congenial quarters. Here were old friends whose yarns recalled the hard and hazardous cruises in the war zone, convoy duty in the Bay of Biscay or bucking the winter gales off the Irish coast.

David Magowan listened and enjoyed it. He was sociable and yet slow of speech, with a habit of self-effacement that made him seem a little

shy. The bits of colored ribbon on his coat denoted honors bestowed by France, England, and America. He had honestly earned them, afloat and ashore. In no sense a brilliant man, few officers of his rank were more highly regarded. It was told of him that during some feverish crisis in Smyrna a nervous junior officer had protested that a delicate point of international law was involved.

'International law, hell!' exclaimed Magowan. 'All a naval officer needs in a jam is tact, guts, and horse sense.'

This compact summary reflected his own character. Rugged of mind and body, as stanch as seasoned oak timber, there was in his soul a strain of sentiment seldom revealed in words. It was too intimate a thing. He was devoted to the Service, to its ideals, traditions, and exacting requirements. Fidelity was his guiding star, duty a beacon whose light was never dimmed. Unvexed by envy or doubt, he had seen many another officer resign his commission to better himself in civil life. David Magowan knew where he belonged.

At the Academy he was assigned to the department of seamanship which was much more to his taste than mathematics or electricity. When

he arrived in June, three classes of midshipmen were at sea for the summer on the practice cruise. The vast dormitory of Bancroft Hall was populated only by the horde of 'plebes,' hundreds of these raw recruits mobilized from every corner of the country. They were uneasy, bewildered boys of all sorts flung into a world utterly strange and different from anything they had known.

Beyond these stone walls the younger generation might laugh at authority and discard manners for jazz. The college campus might tolerate the amiable loafer and the precocious sport with more money than brains. This was a place which inflexibly maintained old-fashioned doctrines whose purpose was to turn out products bearing the hall mark of officer and gentleman. It held that no man can lead until he has learned to obey. It preferred thoroughness to short cuts and a smattering of things. And it placed honor above all else, even dearer than life itself.

No wonder that certain politicians have from time to time seen fit to attack the Naval Academy. It is not in touch with the American spirit of to-day. At large expense to the taxpayers the heads of twenty-four hundred young men are being filled with obsolete nonsense. Quixotic, this notion that anything is to be preferred to

getting rich quick or winning success by bluff and buncombe and 'doing' the other fellow.

Hopeless material these awkward young plebes might seem to an unversed eye, but Lieutenant Commander David Magowan found them immensely interesting. He could foresee the transformation within the space of a few months, how the machine would begin to stamp and mould them after its own pattern, ironing out the slouchy, slack-twisted habits of youth, creating the taut and manly bearing that was the outward symbol of the quickened, disciplined mind.

Appalling young lubbers most of them were when it came to the ways of ships and the sea. As skipper of a fleet of cutters Magowan took them out in squads to learn how to handle oar and sail. They were clumsy beyond words, but it thrilled their young hearts to be on salt water. It was an initiation into the mysteries of the seagoing Navy, the glimpse of a horizon beyond the torments of drill and recitation and formation. Afloat on the Severn they passed the looming hulk of the old Cumberland frigate, the high sides of the captured Spanish cruiser Reina Mercedes, the flock of gray 'sub' chasers moored side by side.

It made these boyish greenhorns more apt to

visit the chapel crypt and stare at the sculptured tomb of John Paul Jones or to wander into Memorial Hall to see the flag that Perry flew in the battle of Lake Erie, boldly lettered with the dying words of Lawrence, 'Don't give up the ship,' or to find in the library hall the frayed British ensigns captured by the Constitution in her immortal actions, the thunder of whose broadsides had echoed around the world.

'The book stuff will be hammered into them hard enough when the academic year begins,' said Magowan. 'During the summer I am glad of the chance to shove into their dumb, corn-fed intellects the fact that the Navy is not a factory.'

Late in August five battleships came steaming in from Chesapeake Bay and the sea beyond. They were bringing fifteen hundred sun-browned, lusty midshipmen home from wandering far in tropic waters, through the Panama Canal and in the Pacific as far as Honolulu. The wistful plebes gazed in wonder and admiration. This was the real stuff, the romance of their dreams.

Every last midshipman of these voyagers had been counting the days to September leave, that golden month of annual vacation. David Magowan had been looking forward to meeting a

nephew of his, a first classman named Anthony Wickham. He had not seen his sister's only son since the boy had entered the Academy three years earlier: popular, by all reports, and a football player. This warmed Magowan's heart because he had played three years on the Navy eleven as tackle. West Point had reason to regret him bitterly. He had been in the nature of a disaster.

In the swirl of getting ashore and departing home, young Anthony Wickham was as difficult to corner as a hen on a hot griddle. Magowan caught him in his room for a minute or two. The first impression was singularly favorable. At sight of his uncle's gold sleeve stripes the midshipman snapped to attention and was punctiliously respectful. He stood square-shouldered and erect, tall but robust. When he relaxed and shook hands, Magowan perceived a grace and ease uncommon for his years. A bully-looking chap, reflected the lieutenant commander, who by contrast appeared quite plain and stolid. By Jove, here was a nephew worth having. Better than that, he ought to make a dashing and competent naval officer.

'Sorry, Uncle Dave, but I am due to shove off,' said the midshipman, with his jolly smile. 'The

O.A.O. has promised to meet me at the station in Baltimore — we'll have thirty minutes together — and I wouldn't miss out for seven million dollars.'

'The One and Only, eh? Fly to it, Tony,' urged the amiable uncle. 'You are not a Red Mike, I see.'

'Off the femmes, you mean? Not me. I had some hard luck, last year — dragged a yard engine to three hops and then she threw me over. She broke my heart.'

'Your lingo sounds familiar,' observed Uncle Dave, 'but I'll be hanged if it is courteous to refer to a perfectly nice girl as a yard engine just because she lives in the Academy grounds.'

'Very well, sir, I'll pipe down,' dutifully answered Anthony Wickham. 'Still keen on the Service, are you? It was you that talked me into coming to the Academy.'

'And glad of it, Tony. Aren't you?'

'Not so I could weep on your shoulder for joy, Uncle Dave. Anyhow, this is the last year of it, and then if the luck breaks right, I won't have to be a blooming ensign.'

'You mean you will resign if the Secretary of the Navy permits it?'

'This class is so big that there may not be

commissions enough to go around,' explained Midshipman Wickham. 'That is the dope at present. Some of us will be let out.'

'Humph! And you want to get out?' said his uncle.

There was a moment's awkward silence, an odd sense of constraint between them. David Magowan's face was heavy and a little sad. The debonair first classman brushed a fleck or two of dust from his blue uniform, picked up a suitcase and a mandolin, and murmured a polite farewell before moving rapidly along the corridor.

Fair-minded as he was, the lieutenant commander tried to convince himself that it was really nothing against this handsome nephew if he had found the Service uncongenial. A slight feeling of uneasiness and disappointment persisted, however, and could not be dispelled. A shrewd judge of men and used to handling them, Magowan was uncannily quick to sense a hidden flaw. He felt anxious to learn more about young Anthony Wickham and to get to know him better.

The opportunity was delayed until a week or so after the regiment of midshipmen had returned from leave and the year's work had swung into its manifold and arduous activities. During

an afternoon lull in his round of duties Magowan strolled across the wide campus. With a whimsical grin he halted in front of the wooden image of a feathered Indian chief which stood on the lawn. It was the figurehead of a sailing frigate of the long ago. To generations of midshipmen it had been known as Tecumseh, the mascot of distressed youth when confronted by the ordeal of examinations.

'The god of 2.5' — which is the lowest passing mark — was the familiar title of the benevolent Tecumseh. He was the patron saint of the bonehead. Gazing at this carven warrior Magowan saluted him with profound respect. Then fishing in a pocket he found several pennies which he tossed at the base of the image. It was a memorial rite, sanctified by long custom. Thus did the lieutenant commander renew his own youth and offer tribute for favors bestowed in the past.

'We were two of a kind, old scout,' he said to himself, 'for I certainly was wooden. I came so near bilging in youngster year that it makes me shudder. It looked for a while as if I'd be anchor man, at the bottom of the list. Well, I pulled up a bit and the Navy couldn't lose me. When it comes to being too critical about another mid-

shipman, and my own nephew at that, perhaps I had better suspend judgment, eh, Tecumseh?'

In this amiable frame of mind he walked to Bancroft Hall and passed through the noble rotunda of this immense building. Keeping on to the stone balcony which overlooked the parade ground and the river, he paused to watch a battalion engaged in the daily infantry drill. Six hundred lads stepped out to the music of the band, marching and wheeling with snap and precision in command of their own midshipman officers with the gold stripes on their sleeves. It was a brave and stirring sight to see — discipline, cohesion, the eternal lesson of trained obedience.

After a while Magowan betook himself to the trampled turf of Farragut Field where the football squads had begun to run off their signal drills. Presently droves of midshipmen, released from duty, came scampering to the bare tiers of seats in the open stands to watch the practice and rehearse the cheers and slogans of the Navy. A group of them began to sing the battle anthem of 'Anchors Aweigh.' It was the spirit of the Academy, defiant and indomitable. Here was a song for sailormen, with a flavor all its own. You

would hear nothing resembling it on the college campus:

Stand, Navy, down the field,
Sails set to the sky.
We'll never change our course,
So, Army, you steer shy-y-y-y.
Roll up the score, Navy,
Anchors aweigh;
Sail, Navy, down the field
And sink the Army,
Sink the Army Gray.

This was enough to awaken the old fire in David Magowan, veteran of three heroic contests with the elevens of West Point. For the remaining hour of this autumn afternoon nothing in the world was so important as football. He found a seat with several other officers. Then with an expert eye he studied the operations of the A Squad from which had been sorted a first and a second eleven for a hard period of scrimmage.

He was quick to observe that his nephew was playing at tackle on the second team. Presently they lined up and a quarter back shouted a string of signal numbers. The rush lines crashed, swayed, and broke to the impact of a headlong runner and his interference. Then it was one

crafty formation after another, a masked attempt to flank one end of the line, or the swift strategy of the forward pass. The coach was a loose-jointed, cynical person with a biting vocabulary who was reported to mutter in his sleep, 'We've *got* to lick the Army.'

To the scrutiny of Lieutenant Commander Magowan it was soon revealed that Tony Wickham was an extraordinarily good tackle. He was very fast on his feet, with no end of power and dash, and showed flashes of that football genius — of divining the opponents' tactics, of alertly following the ball — which no amount of teaching can implant. He was ever so much better than the man playing against him on the first eleven. Offhand this was perplexing.

While Uncle David was turning this problem over in his logical mind, the superintendent of the Academy came sauntering along to take the air and watch his boys in the mimic warfare of the football field. Every inch a sailor in manner and appearance was Rear Admiral Henry Culver. Stalwart and ruddy, he had come to Annapolis from the Atlantic fleet where he had flown the four-starred pennant of the commander-in-chief. This present task was far more difficult than maneuvering divisions of

mighty battleships. Every moment of the day was rigorously organized and directed for these twenty-four hundred naturally rampant midshipmen. The admiral sat on the lid. The interference of Congress, often stupid and hasty, made life no easier. A man of force and high temper, he held himself well in hand and was very human in his official relations.

The gold-braided cap tipped a trifle over one eye, he seated himself on the plank seat beside the absorbed Uncle David and cheerily exclaimed:

'How does it look to you, Magowan? You ought to know. Not as heavy a team as last year and we lost several bang-up good men. But I have a hunch — also a bet or two — that the Navy will come through.'

'A humdinger of a back field, sir,' was the serious reply, 'but two or three weak spots in the line will have to be plugged. It is early in the season, of course, and there is a lot of bully material. Now take that tackle position. I may be biased, but I choose Wickham to run rings around the gawky lad that is playing opposite him.'

'And the gawky lad is a plebe, at that,' was the admiral's comment. 'It does look queer,

Magowan. Wickham is a nephew of yours, I understand. Well, I wish to Heaven you could tell me what ails him.'

Magowan looked startled. This was like reading his own mind, but expressed more positively. He shook his head with a mystified frown and stared at the football field before he said:

'Something is the matter with him then, sir? I am very fond of my sister and this is her one chick. I have met him only once since I came to the Academy. It jolted me, of course, to find that he wanted to chuck the Service, but I called myself an old fool for suspecting that he had a soft spot.'

'Blamed if I know what it is,' observed Rear Admiral Henry Culver after jumping up to cheer the brilliant run of a half back who had dodged through a broken field. 'Wickham ought to be a star man in every respect. One of the brightest minds in his class, they tell me, but his marks fail to show it. He trails along with a safe margin above 2.5 and lets it go at that. He ought to be a battalion three-striper — he has the elements of leadership and military character — but he simply doesn't connect.'

'How does he show up on the conduct reports, sir?' asked Magowan who was keenly interested

in the discussion. 'I have been intending to look up his record.'

'If he is busting the regulations, he manages to get by with it,' said the admiral, with a twinkle. 'He has rated no severe doses of punishment. Now take football; for two years Wickham has played tackle on the first eleven until well into the season — had the berth cinched. A regular sixteen-inch gun! Then he blew up. They didn't put him in against the Army. Now they have shoved a plebe in ahead of him, I see, right at the jump-off. Wickham's last year, too.'

'I shall make it my business to find out what has jammed the boy,' doggedly remarked Magowan. 'He doesn't come up to specifications, that is one sure thing. He is not steaming his contract speed. Wow, look at him smash into that formation. I tell you, he is one hellion of a football player.'

'The best tackle, I have heard him called, since Dave Magowan ate 'em alive,' chuckled the admiral. 'But *you* never slowed up, and there is the difference.'

At this moment the first eleven was held for downs on the ten-yard line, Tony Wickham looming in the fray. The massed midshipmen on the bleachers, a thousand strong, erupted in

the siren cheer, which climbed and climbed into an ear-piercing volume of shrill sound that was amazingly like the whoop of the whistle of a big ship. The nimble cheer leaders pranced frantically to and fro, denouncing as a traitor every man who failed to back the Navy by splitting his thorax and yelling himself black in the face for the team. The admiral moved over to the side line. Let the colleges argue the question of football — whether it was a help or a hindrance to education. Here on Farragut Field this doubt was never raised. Football had its part in the training of a naval officer. The admiral was ready to swear to it.

Lieutenant Commander Magowan drifted away from his friends and waited in a sober mood until the weary players were dismissed. The field was dusky with shadows. Lights gleamed in the myriad windows of Bancroft Hall. A bugle sounded from the prison ship Reina in which naughty midshipmen were confined. Magowan overtook the director of physical training, Commander Douglas Knapp, who was in general charge of the various athletic interests of the Academy. They loitered arm in arm, deciding to dine together at the club.

'I know what hung a grouch on you, Dave,'

said Douglas Knapp, in his slow, drawling voice. 'You can't savvy the case of First Classman Anthony Wickham, the boy prodigy. I guess I can tell you as much about his football career as "Pop" Farwell, the coach. Pop loses his temper when you chew it over with him.'

'It begins to look to me as if you haven't known how to handle the kid,' growled Lieutenant Commander Magowan. 'What is the idea of disrating him in favor of that big clumsy plebe that falls over his own feet? Why, confound it, Doug, Tony Wickham is All-American stuff. He has everything.'

'You can't start anything with me, Dave,' drawled Commander Knapp. 'I agree with you. I hope and pray we can make him mad enough to fight his way back to the first team and stay there for the finish. It's the last bet. I have seen him fade out of the picture for two years. Nothing could stop him until the last fortnight or so before the Army game and then — goodnight. He had the style, but the punch was gone.'

'It won't happen this year,' strongly exclaimed Magowan, 'if I have to knock his head off. Family pride is at stake. He is near enough kin to me to make this a personal affair.'

'The Academy wishes you luck, Dave,' was the dry response. 'I'd be pretty near willing to lose a leg to get that lad going right to wallop the Army mule. He has surely got the Navy's goat. You will have to be the doctor, old man. We hereby pass the buck. All our remedies have failed.'

'Watch my smoke,' solemnly declared Lieutenant Commander Magowan. 'What is an uncle for?'

CHAPTER II

THE SNAPPY GIRL FROM BALTIMORE

UNAWARE that his resolute uncle regarded him as a problem to be solved by the kill-or-cure method, Anthony Wickham, first classman, went his own cheerful gait. The fact that the first eleven had discarded him as early in the season as this was no tragedy in his young life. In his heart he felt a sense of relief. For two years he had suffered the bitter unhappiness of being cast aside almost on the eve of the Army game.

It had not been due to lack of physical condition. He had never been trained too fine or driven too hard, nor had his courage faltered when he had faced such formidable antagonists as Princeton or Penn State. But the time had arrived, each year, when the edge of his fighting spirit had become dulled, when he had dreaded football instead of feeling eager for it. It was like the spell of an influence which he could not grapple with or master.

Better to face the truth and accept the inevitable than to fail again. As he said to himself, a jinx had put a crimp in his football career and

there was no sense in trying to beat it. This may explain why he felt so little jealousy or resentment toward the rangy, pugnacious plebe who was being tried out for the tackle position which he had forfeited.

This Derby Powell was a two-fisted son of the soil who had been a sophomore at a small college in Ohio when he obtained an appointment to the Naval Academy. He was nineteen years old and had won some fame for football prowess on his native heath. Clumsy, perhaps, but as strong as a horse and grit to his heels, he was anxious to learn and displayed a stubborn indifference to bumps and bruises. It is with such tractable material that the wisdom and patience of the good coach can now and then work wonders. Pop Farwell was moved to remark:

'What this Derby Powell packs into the old bean is there for good. It comes hard and slow, but it *stays* there. He doesn't flash like Tony Wickham, who makes him look like a boob on the field, but he won't fizzle out. And he won't be so sluggish a month from now. He is learning how to handle himself. Nervous — can you blame him? That is partly the matter. Just being a plebe is enough to give any lad a terrible opinion of life.'

Such necessary annoyances as football and plebes rolled from the mind of Midshipman Wickham when the One and Only sent word from Baltimore that she could run down for the Saturday night hop and stay over a day. Would he please reserve a room at the hotel, Carvel Hall? She would try to dig up a chaperon. If not, they would have to run the awful risk. Silly, out-of-date junk, Tony, old dear, that a girl couldn't go out for a whirl without hauling a mother along or some sleepy frump to gloom the game. Wouldn't Tony be glad to see his precious little Vida, seeing as she would do her darnedest to pack along a quart of gin cocktails?

In Tony's matured opinion, here was a girl with a kick to her — perfectly all right, straight and all that — but with a snappy line. Step on the gas was her style. And dance? She sure did agitate a mean little foot. She made the Annapolis girls look moored to a buoy. He was off those Crabtown drags for life.

Convinced that Miss Vida Hart deserved this fervent eulogy, Midshipman Wickham counted the slow passage of time until Saturday night — 'three sleeps and a butt,' in the seagoing patois of Bancroft Hall. What happened at the Academy hop is not essential to the movement of this

story or to the fortunes of young Mr. Wickham. His particular 'femme' was one of a swarm of pretty and volatile creatures from far and near who found it entrancing to dance with brass-buttoned youth and to listen to the artful blandishments of that species of devotion known as 'the Navy line.'

The admiral and his wife were present, together with a dignified detail of chaperons, and decorum joined hands with gayety. Tony Wickham refused a nip from the silver flask which Vida had tucked into her coat. He maintained this Spartan attitude even when they walked back to the hotel together. He was in training, for one thing; the watch officer might smell his breath, for another; and he wished Vida would ease up a bit on the hooch. Everybody was doing it, but when you were head over heels in love with a girl you were liable to get fussy about her.

Halting in the shadows of a small, quaint street, Vida snuggled close and looked up at him with an air of mutiny.

'Kiss me and cut out that silly chatter, Tony. Let the chaplain do it when I go to chapel tomorrow. He gets paid for it.'

'I am not scolding, honey,' he hastily exclaimed, 'but when you come down here all by

yourself, minus a convoy, you ought to watch your step. I don't want to have you gossiped about.'

'Who is going to gossip?' Vida retorted. 'I suppose you intend to publish it in "The Log" that I offered intoxicating liquor to a righteous midshipman and a minor at that. You make my ear ache, Tony.'

'But I mean it about this pocket-flask-and-gin-cocktail trick, Vida,' he awkwardly persisted. 'I guess I must have a few old-fashioned ideas left — when it comes to the ladies.'

'Shut up or go back to the yard. I can find Carvel Hall,' she flung at him in a hard little voice.

He stalked at her side in dumb dignity. This was the nearest they had ever come to a quarrel. Vida had stood any amount of joshing from him, like a good sport, in the spirit of give-and-take. To-night she seemed to be looking for trouble.

Relenting, she bade him an affectionate good-night at the hotel. The clouds cleared as if by magic. He was only too eager to forgive and forget. As he hurried back to Bancroft Hall, a slightly disquieting thought obtruded itself. He was on the list of the six first classmen who had been invited, with their young ladies, to dine at

the admiral's house on Sunday. It had occurred to this kindly dictator that such hospitality might be a useful detail of a naval officer's education. Therefore he had made it a custom to invite so many of these young gentlemen every week. They had come to the Academy from all ranks of life. For them to be familiar with the niceties of social usage he considered to be indispensable.

Now Anthony Wickham was no stranger to the refinements of life. His mother belonged to an old family in a small Connecticut city and his father was a manufacturer who, starting in a small way, had put together a considerable fortune. Of course it would be delightful to dine with Rear Admiral and Mrs. Culver in the superintendent's spacious and beautiful home, but was the adorable Vida precisely the girl for the occasion? Such a thought was horribly disloyal. It made him feel like a whipped pup. Was she too snappy? However, elderly people were hard to please nowadays, and what difference could it make? Vida was beautiful and the last word in style. Trust her to pull it off without making any breaks.

Having argued himself into an easier mind, Tony reached his room and made ready for bed.

From the flat pillow of the other cot a tousled head raised itself like a turtle's and grunted:

'Hullo, you snake! Drove 'em crazy, as usual, I suppose. Darn little painted flappers; I don't see why they fall for you. It must be your face and figger.'

'Calk off, Bill. I like you better when you snore,' blithely retorted Tony. 'It's Hades to have to live with a scolding wife. It was a grand little hop. Did you bone to-night or write silly editorials?'

Midshipman William Satterlee groaned and let his head fall upon the pillow. He was a sallow, temperamental young man of literary ambitions who served as editor-in-chief of 'The Log,' the sprightly illustrated weekly journal which mirrored life as seen from Bancroft Hall. How he found time to crowd it into the daily routine seemed prodigious. He was always harassed and hurried, shy of sleep, and taking life on the run, never quite catching up with it.

'I chased a lot of loafers who call themselves assistant editors, and tried to write some bright and funny verses, and cursed the whole blighted mob of midshipmen for their lack of Navy spirit, to the tune of half a column, Tony. And you were wasting a perfectly good evening on that Baltimore broiler of yours.'

'Lay off that, Bill, or I'll break a chair over you,' savagely threatened Vida's young man.

'Oh, well, it might as well be this one as another,' grumbled the cynic. 'Better tell her to soft-pedal at the admiral's dinner party tomorrow.'

'On the level, Bill, do you mean that?' demanded Wickham, his misgivings pricking him anew. 'What's the matter with Vida?'

'She swears and drinks hard liquor and likes the kind of stories I dassn't print in "The Log." Oh, it's done in the smartest circles, Tony, old man, but the admiral is dreadfully mid-Victorian.'

'Here, let's talk this thing over, Bill. You dined there two weeks ago. What kind of a game is it?'

'Good Lord, can't I *ever* get any sleep?' yawned William Satterlee, covering his head with a blanket. 'You can get away with it. You always do — with anything short of murder. Now let me be.'

When Anthony Wickham surged into his clothes early next morning to gallop to the terrace where the regiment assembled for breakfast formation, his unhappiness had vanished with the night. The weather was bright, with an autumn tang in the air, he had slid into the com-

pany line two seconds ahead of the last blast and so escaped the 'pap sheet' or conduct report, and the prettiest girl of them all would be waiting after chapel to walk with him through Lover's Lane. Bill Satterlee was a putrid old fish, a confirmed Red Mike who hated all women.

Alas, for that delicious stroll through Lover's Lane and on down to the river before the admiral's dinner. Vida had never been more fascinating to the youthful eye — golden hair and lustrous eyes, vivid lips and a damask cheek. No gown could have been more fashionably skimped nor silk stockings gauzier. She affected an air almost demure as befitted the Sabbath day — a maiden of a saintly heart who had forsworn the flesh and the devil.

Instead of letting well enough alone here, Tony displayed the folly of his extreme youth by blurting out:

'Now if you will only hold that pose for a couple of hours more I can give you a 4.0 mark. I had a foolish feeling that you might short-circuit the dinner table and touch something off.'

'My manners and morals seem to give you a whole lot of worry, Mr. Wickham,' flared Vida. 'Who's been talking to you about me? That quinine pill of a room-mate?'

'Not on your life. I wouldn't stand for it,' lied Anthony. 'Listen, Vida, I'll send you that emerald pin this week, the one you saw in Howard & Kenmore's window the last time you came to Annapolis. Now sweeten up and talk pretty.'

'Wait till I clutch the pin,' said Vida in milder accents. 'My goodness, Tony, will you honestly loosen up for that heavenly bauble? Hold my arm. I feel a faintness.'

'Oh, I can hang it up until after graduation,' was the easy rejoinder. 'I have my failings, but I am no tightwad.'

'Thank Heavens for that, old dear. I hate to break it to you, but you will have to pay my bill at Carvel Hall. I had the money, but I crashed into a party in Baltimore Friday night and the way the cards ran was enough to make your old Tecumseh weep.'

The midshipman flushed and hesitated before he said:

'Certainly, Vida. I'm delighted. That is the fatal flaw in gambling. Somebody has to lose.'

She laughed rather loudly and was not wholly at ease. The ingenuous young man could not mask his feelings. He was perceptibly ruffled. It was not unheard of that a midshipman should pay a girl's expenses when she came to town for

an Academy hop, but — and here was the rub — it was not done by the sort of girls one would be likely to meet at the admiral's house nor would they be so careless in the matter of chaperonage. This was what came into the mind of Anthony Wickham. The elusive, lurking doubt had been dragged to the surface by the brutal Bill Satterlee. It now began to haunt him.

Vida Hart was a shrewd little buccaneer who knew when to trim sail and weather a squall. With the smile and the glance that Tony had found so fatal, she fondly murmured:

'Of course I shall send you the money tomorrow, silly boy. You didn't imagine I meant to sponge on you, did you? If you look at me again like that I shall scream and jump off the dock. I am wild about you, Tony. You are absolutely thrilling. And jealous? When I saw all those bits of fluff vamping you at the hop, I was *furious.*'

The tall first classman tried bravely to resume the sentimental patter which he did so well, but his pleasant voice lacked conviction. He was absent-minded. They walked in the direction of Rear Admiral Culver's mansion. Tony felt no happier when he saw pacing ahead of them a gray-haired, trimly built naval officer whose

sleeves were resplendent with the gold bands of an *Admiral*, not a rear admiral or a vice-admiral, but a full *Admiral* of the United States Navy. Higher than that there was nothing but the blue sky and the Supreme Being.

'That must be old Witherspoon, chief of operations,' murmured the midshipman in tones of awe. 'I suppose he has run over from Washington to chew the rag with the superintendent. Buddies for years and years and they were in the fleet together.'

'Pooh with your terrible admiral. I hope he sits next to me at dinner,' said Vida, suffering a naughty relapse. 'Will you mind very much if I chuck him under the chin? The older they are the harder they fall.'

'No danger. They will seat us children in a row,' he replied, with a frown. 'Hum-m, I'd sooner be hit in the neck by fourteen demerits. Well, here goes, Vida, old darling. And don't you dare to break out the vanity box and swab your sassy little nose in public.'

'Coward!' she cried as they turned into the path which crossed the green carpet of turf behind the garden walls.

No hostess could have met them with a demeanor more gracious than the superintendent's

wife. Mrs. Culver felt a maternal interest in her midshipmen guests, so boyish, so self-conscious, and yet so splendidly dignified to behold. First Classman Wickham and his One and Only joined the group of young people who chatted in a large reception room.

Several older guests had drifted into the library. Through the doorway Tony Wickham had a glimpse of the vastly impressive Admiral Witherspoon who was smoking a cigarette and laughing at a remark of a thickset, serious-looking lieutenant commander. They appeared to be on the most companionable terms.

'Dave Magowan! My revered uncle!' ejaculated Tony, a shade of dismay on his handsome features.

'Lead me to him,' commanded Vida. 'I can tell him more about his nephew than he is wise enough to guess. Not so frivolous, is he, Tony? Solid as a brick house. Can we jazz him up?'

'Not that bird! You ought to watch him mark me in seamanship. You might think we were perfect strangers. Snap out of it or extra duty for you is his motto. You steer wide of Uncle Dave, Vida.'

Dinner was served. There were twenty-odd guests in all. It was ceremonious, as befitted the

rank and station of the host, but the atmosphere was pleasantly informal once they were gathered at the long table. The dozen young people, at first feeling a certain stiffness, were soon thawed by the bluff affability of Rear Admiral Henry Culver. He had both tact and humor, with a fine simplicity of manner when official duties were laid aside. Admiral Witherspoon turned out to be a most entertaining person, mellowed by a quizzical twinkle and an explosive laugh. These two elderly gentlemen ragged each other as if they were again young watch officers on the same ship's deck.

Lieutenant Commander David Magowan devoted himself to the wife of the captain of a superdreadnaught who made her home in Annapolis. Magowan was an excellent listener. It was one of his shining virtues. They got on famously. Her volubility permitted him to let his gaze wander now and then to his attractive nephew and the girl at his side. The more the uncle studied Miss Vida Hart, the quieter and more abstracted was his mood.

He was no narrow-minded, fossilized critic of the younger generation, but a tolerant man of the world who had found much folly, much evil, and much redeeming goodness in humankind.

What he called *class* was the attribute that atoned for many a fault. In a word, it summed up his code. He had found it in hard, unlettered bluejackets. It was conspicuous in many a chief petty officer. It was lacking in many an alleged gentleman.

Applying this test to men, it was not so much what they were as what they did. Women he appraised by a different set of standards. *Class* was discernible to the eye and by the little things that were usually insignificant.

'What a peach of a boy your nephew is,' said the captain's wife at his elbow. 'You must be tremendously proud of him. Er — who is the girl? Do you happen to know?'

'I don't know. From Baltimore, I believe. What do you think of her, Mrs. Whipple?'

'Do you really wish me to tell you?'

'Yes. A passing fancy of his, I take it, but —'

'Not as nice as those other girls across the table,' said she, with a slight shrug. 'Rather noticeable, the difference, in such company as this, don't you think?'

'Cheap!' he exclaimed. 'Not tough, understand, but cheap. A brazen little gold-digger. Not that I object to the flappers. I love 'em — paint, lipsticks, insolence, and the whole bag of

tricks. Youth will be served, in one way or another. But there is a type that finds these midshipmen good hunting, girls that work in the shops of Baltimore and Washington or have been let run wild by very ordinary parents.'

'A specimen yonder, do you mean?' asked the captain's wife, her smile sympathetic. She admired David Magowan. His brother officers had told her much about him.

'I fancy so. The sort that pulls a midshipman's leg for expensive presents and wheedles him into piling up graduation debts that may worry him for years.'

'I know, Commander Magowan. It is against regulations, this rotten debt business, but these big jewelry houses with their branches in Annapolis are doing all they can to encourage it. They give a midshipman almost unlimited credit and trust to his honor as an officer and gentleman to get their money after he leaves the Academy.'

This discussion was diverted by the brisk accents of Admiral Witherspoon who was saying to Rear Admiral Culver:

'Now, Henry, if this is an old one, put a stopper on me. A destroyer executive of the Queenstown outfit passed it on to me. He was censoring the enlisted men's mail and a husky bos'n's mate

started a letter to his wife like this: "Dear Mary, for God's sake leave me be and let me enjoy this world's war in peace."'

'Haw, haw,' boomed the superintendent. 'That makes me laugh every time I hear it, Dick. Remember when we were in the old Helena, the flatiron of a gunboat, on the China station? "Skinny Ike" Crawford, the paymaster, fell out of a sampan in his dress uniform — at Shanghai, wasn't it? We dropped a boat and the coxswain gaffed the seat of his breeches with a boathook as he was bubbling to the bottom. His whole trousers fetched away — it was about sunset and we had some English ladies on the quarter-deck for dinner and a little dance — and poor old Crawford came scudding up the gangway under bare poles — he was an infernally bashful man —'

''Vast and belay, Henry,' chided the high and mighty Admiral Witherspoon, chief of operations. 'I don't like the way you are heading. We do not care to hear the one about the seasick sailor. You have a certain Elizabethan flavor at times; not rough but hearty.'

Midshipman Anthony Wickham laughed politely, but there was no mirth in his heart. He was painfully conscious of his uncle's scrutiny and aware that Vida was in disfavor. The cap-

tain's wife also disliked her. This could be read in her frequent glances. They were talking about the girl he had brought to the dinner, reflected the glowering Tony. His face burned with anger.

He hated these unfriendly critics. Fools! Why couldn't they mind their own business? He was on the defensive, his pride touched to the quick. Vida was all right. In style and looks she put it all over the rest of the girls. Wasn't she behaving like a little lady? There was nothing the matter with her. His grouchy uncle deserved to have his head punched.

Vida found her Tony rather poor company, wherefore she amused herself with another young man. He was Rear Admiral Culver's aide, a blithe lieutenant with an engaging air who was proficient in small talk. His routine duties were partly social. Some of them bored him much more than a bit of skilled flirtation with a girl like Vida.

She had been quick to notice Tony's embarrassment and had an intuition that she was the cause of it. Therefore she resolved to punish him by vamping the lieutenant who seemed to find it enjoyable. Alas, there came one of those lulls in the conversation around the table — the curious

moments of silence which occur in the most delightful dinner parties.

It was unfortunate for Vida. She failed to perceive that her voice alone was audible. It was a high voice with a note of shrillness in it. Not a word was missed as she emphatically informed the lieutenant:

'Indeed I did say it, and him a man 'most as old and chesty as a star-spangled admiral. I gave him a frozen look and told him if he had to paw anybody he'd better go home and pet his wife. A real gentleman would know how to behave even if he was soused, I told him. I was simply *furious*.'

The lieutenant grinned and hastily erased it. He had been too well trained to laugh at the wrong time. His ears were pink. No need to look about him. The silence had become oppressive. It could have been cut with a knife. Even Vida was reduced to a frightened little whisper of:

'Why didn't you nudge me, stupid? Now I *am* in Dutch.'

Midshipman Wickham stared at his plate. Rear Admiral Culver had looked at him sharply. It was like an unofficial reprimand. Then the awkward moment passed. The hostess resumed

an argument with Admiral Witherspoon. A graceless midshipman giggled and found something to say to the girl at his left. Lieutenant Commander Magowan gazed glumly at the captain's wife and in a mechanical manner told her a tale of his adventures in the war zone.

Vida wore a chastened, sullen air. She did not have to be told that this was her farewell appearance as a guest of the United States Naval Academy. The steam roller of Puritan convention had passed over her. Her style had been too snappy for these slow ginks, she realized, and they had no more use for her.

The quixotic Anthony Wickham was amazed at his own emotions. He was indignant, not at Vida, but at this censorious audience which had so cruelly condemned her. It was sublimely foolish youth rushing to the succor of a damsel in distress. These other girls, so smug and demure, so careful of their manners, were glad to see poor little Vida disgraced. It was a petty, disgusting spirit of envy, the eternal feminine. Darned hypocrites! If you only knew the truth about them!

Grand and gloomy was this tragic first classman until the ladies adjourned to the reception room and the men wandered out to the paved

sun parlor for coffee and cigars. Then the behavior of Midshipman Wickham was even more peculiar. Instead of sedulously avoiding his unpleasant uncle, he beckoned him aside, not without visible trepidation.

'May I have a few words with you, sir? Sorry to bother you, but it is awfully important.'

'No bother, Tony, if I can be of service, but cut it short,' was the gruff response.

Tony sighed and they moved to a divan in a distant corner. He proceeded to explain, after a false start or two:

'Will you lend me some money, sir? Right now, I mean. It's not very much — fifteen dollars will do — but I've got to have it this afternoon. And I can't possibly scrape up this much in Bancroft Hall. You know how it is. We are not allowed to keep any cash for emergencies. They treat us like kids.'

'An emergency, Tony?' queried Uncle David with a scowl that was not suspicious. 'Why do you need money Sunday afternoon? What's your hurry? Seems to me it's against regulations for me to let you have it.'

'Maybe so, sir, and I realize that we are both in uniform and you are my superior officer,' pursued the anxious nephew, 'but if you could for-

get that, sort of as man to man, it would be enormously kind of you.'

'As man to man, then, son, proceed.'

'I am shy fifteen dollars and don't know where else to turn. That's the whole story,' said Tony with a wretched foreboding that he was to be put to the torture.

'Come clean,' sternly exclaimed the martinet. 'No four-flushing. You look as guilty as a whipped pup. Has the girl stung you for only fifteen dollars this trip?'

'I don't propose to bring a lady's name into it,' was poor Tony's severe rejoinder. 'If you have to know, I am merely advancing the amount of her hotel bill. She was unlucky enough to lose — er — her funds.'

'They wouldn't let her shoot with her own dice, I suppose. If fifteen dollars will waft her out of town this afternoon, it is a good investment.'

'Look here, sir, I don't propose to let you insult her, even if you are my uncle and a two-and-a-half striper to boot.'

'Forget the stripes, you infatuated young ass,' said David Magowan, carefully restraining his voice. 'You will begin to holler at me in a minute. No more busts to-day, if you please. Come

out on the lawn and we'll finish this little confab.'

The irate midshipman followed him through the conservatory and so to a path among the shrubbery. David Magowan displayed no outward irritability. He was not that kind. Reflectively chewing a cigar, he measured his words as he said:

'You won't lie to me, Tony. They don't breed liars at the Academy. You seem to be sailing on a wrong slant. Are you running yourself into debt? How much has this Baltimore doll nicked you for so far? I don't mean chicken-feed like this hotel bill. I take your word for it that she met with financial misfortune. As a gentleman, you have to salvage her.'

'I have given her some presents, sir,' steadily replied the first classman and he looked his uncle in the eye. 'And I have promised her an emerald pin that she took a fancy to. That will set me back a couple of hundred.'

'Hell's bells!' exclaimed Magowan. 'But you can cancel that claim. It is all off after today, isn't it? No class, Tony. She won't do. You sized that up for yourself. I saw it written all over your map at dinner. And she will be scratched for the next hop. Trust Mrs. Culver to attend to that little thing.'

'That has nothing to do with the emerald pin, sir,' was the stubborn reply. 'I gave her my word. In a question of honor I can chart my own course.'

'You know I can report you for these debts, Tony? However, I prefer not to. This is a family affair, confound you.'

'Will you write to my father about it?' asked the nephew.

'Not on your life!' exclaimed Magowan. 'I'd sooner settle your debts out of my own pay. This is not the essential question, Tony, my boy. It is merely one of your symptoms. I never dreamed there could be a rotten streak in you. When I was ordered to the Academy, I looked forward to knowing you, with no end of pride and satisfaction in your career as a midshipman. The first thing I learned was that you wanted to chuck the Service. That hit me right between the eyes, of course, but I tried to reconcile myself to it. Then I found you had been a rank quitter on the football field. And now you make me most damnably ashamed of you in the admiral's house. This is all for to-day, Tony. Here is your fifteen dollars. Now go back to your cheap skirt and tell her to shove off for Baltimore.'

The midshipman's lip quivered. He clenched his fists and stepped forward. Magowan was unmoved, his hands clasped behind him.

'If you were not in uniform I'd make you fight or apologize!' cried young Wickham in tremulous accents.

'Attention! Right face! March!' rasped the lieutenant commander.

The midshipman obeyed.

CHAPTER III

AN UNCLE WITH A LOGICAL MIND

It occurred to David Magowan to spend a week-end in Kensington, Connecticut. He had not seen his sister, Mrs. Morris Wickham, since his return from foreign service. What turned his thoughts in her direction at this particular time was the fact that she was the mother of Anthony, the perplexing first classman. Magowan was a thoroughgoing person who believed in working back from effects to causes. He was as logical as the law of gravitation. Things do not happen — they are brought about, was one of his favorite sayings.

The Naval Academy could not make men. It trained them for a highly technical and difficult profession, but it could not supply the essential elements of character. The midshipman, taking him by and large, was bound to reflect the influences of the home and the community from which he had come. This sounds trite enough — a threadbare axiom that may be applied to any school or college campus. For Lieutenant Com-

mander Magowan, however, it seemed to possess a personal and intimate interest.

His sister met him at the Kensington station. They had always been fond of each other. In age they were not far apart. David was the younger by three years. Temperamentally they had been curiously unlike. She had been a slender girl of a certain shy and fragile quality of beauty, with a sensitive imagination and a feeling for romance. There had been dreams of a musical career. The cramped circumstances of a schoolmaster's family had thwarted it.

The middle-aged woman who kissed her stalwart sailor brother was no longer slender nor did she appear to be sighing for the misty kingdom of romance. Life had bestowed rewards more tangible. A colored chauffeur in livery stood waiting to open the door of an ornate limousine. Said the hard-headed David whose tastes were so simple:

'Last time I blew in, Susie, you were driving a flivver and tearing your hair over the high cost of living. Back on Easy Street, I see. Glad of it. How is my hustling brother-in-law? Still oozing pep and optimism from every pore?'

'I can tell you about it, Dave, while we drive home. Business depression tied things up for a while, but Morris never lost his nerve. He was

superb. Things are booming again and the factory is running two shifts.'

As the limousine turned into the main business street of Kensington, Magowan patted his sister's hand and said, with an affectionate smile:

'Not quite the same as when we kids were so happy and so poor, Susie. A background of luxury suits you very well. Your good looks have stayed with you. I should call you a well-preserved woman.'

'What a beastly remark, Dave! You never did have a delicate touch with the ladies. As a matter of fact I am worn to the bone with the troubles of keeping a big house running. Decent servants are impossible to find. Morris likes to have things done awfully well. You can have no idea what I have been through with one worthless butler after another.'

'No, I can't possibly realize it, sis. A Filipino mess boy is as far as I ever got. Why is a butler? I never did figure it out.'

'Teasing me as usual,' smiled Mrs. Morris Wickham. 'Now be serious and tell me how Tony is getting on. You officers on duty at the Academy expect so much of a poor slave of a midshipman that I am afraid to ask about my own boy.'

The plain-spoken David could be adroit when the occasion required it. In this instance he preferred to feel his way.

'I met Tony at dinner last Sunday, Susie. He was grand, no need to tell you that. It doesn't do for me to pay too much attention to him — he will be accused of greasing me, as they say. He is very popular and has had no serious trouble with his marks.'

'Is *that* all you can say for the finest midshipman in the Academy, Dave? Why, I expected to hear you rave about him. Isn't he a star of the first magnitude?'

'He ought to be,' said David. 'I have tried to stir him up a bit.'

'Of course you would feel prejudiced against him,' exclaimed the doting mother, 'because he has failed to make the Navy football team. That is your pet hobby. Goodness knows the poor boy has tried hard enough. The coach has treated him abominably. I know all about that. Tony has never whimpered, mind you, but I could see how dreadfully he felt last year.'

'Yes, Susie,' grunted her brother and lapsed into his rôle of a listener.

The Wickham residence was set on a hill overlooking the town and the small river that flowed

through it. Looming from a huddle of small houses were the buildings of the plant in which the Morris Wickham Company manufactured an amazing variety of brass fittings and hardware. The autumn day was drawing to a close. Lights gleamed from row on row of factory windows. David Magowan, quietly observant, murmured under his breath:

'Too much prosperity, perhaps. I shouldn't wonder.'

The man who opened the door of the pretentious Wickham house was the latest affliction in butlers, so Magowan took for granted. He was trim and respectful enough, an alert young man with a healthy color who looked as if he might have been previously engaged in employment more vigorous than this. He walked with a slight limp. He had taken Magowan's bag from the car when the lieutenant commander ripped out a jubilant expletive, slapped the butler on the shoulder, shook his hand, and shouted:

'For the Lord's sake, "Spud" McIntyre, I am glad to see you aboard. What are you doing in a rotten flunky job like this?'

The butler squared his shoulders, threw up his chin, and answered with an amazed grin:

'The easiest berth I could find, skipper. I was

steward in a club before I enlisted. I had to quit the Service — they gave me a disability discharge on account of this gimpy leg. Now I sure have got to buttle right or you will log me for punishment.'

'Ten days' pay and liberty stopped if you so much as bat an eye on duty, you sundowner,' rasped Magowan, his face beaming.

Mrs. Morris Wickham was a shocked spectator of this extraordinary reunion. Her rigid sense of the proprieties was jarred to the foundations. With difficulty she waited until the erring butler had gone upstairs. Then she addressed her even guiltier brother.

'What *do* you mean, Dave, by spoiling a man I have taken *such* pains with? I really had hopes of him. And a naval officer is usually so careful of the Service distinctions, of what a gentleman should do. I am surprised beyond words.'

'So am I, Susie. Let me feel your pulse,' scoffed the lieutenant commander. 'Do you know who this bird is? He was a gunner's mate, first class, in the yacht Tarpon that I commanded on the Breton patrol. He sailed as commissary steward, but it almost broke his heart. He had the stuff, do you see? So I changed his rating and put him on deck. He made good and was in charge of a

gun crew when the yacht was torpedoed off Quiberon. Thirty-four men and two officers of us were blown to bits or drowned before they had time to say their prayers. McIntyre floated on a piece of wreckage and lent me a hand, by the way. I was pulled down by the suction and it seemed like seven years before I came up for air. That's where he hurt his leg. Shake hands with him? It's an honor. Why didn't he let me know he was up against it and had to *buttle?* Hell's bells, a man who won a wound stripe and the Navy Cross!'

Mrs. Wickham's injured feelings were not mended. More than this, she was angry. Her brother was riding roughshod in her household, as though she deserved to be scolded for something or other. Her expression hardened and her accents were not sisterly as she said:

'How was I to know that McIntyre had served in the Navy during the war? And what difference does it make? I am paying him excellent wages. And the man drinks. I have smelled it on his breath.'

'It is enough to drive him to drink, Susie. But you can't tell me that he falls down on his duty. He is not that kind of a gob.'

'This is most distressing for me, Dave. Must

I treat this servant as a friend of yours while you are staying here?'

'Not on your life! You don't know the Navy. No need to say a word to Spud McIntyre. He will be strictly on the job, to the very last gadget. When I catch him off watch — well, that is our own affair.'

'But I should think the habit of discipline and authority would prevent such a scene as your almost hugging the butler in my hall,' she persisted. 'One of the maids was giggling on the landing. I had a very different idea of the Navy.'

'Nobody calls the Navy slack, Susie,' was the good-humored reply. 'It is efficient but human. Did you hear any of the volunteer gobs come back and curse the regulars?'

Mrs. Wickham could not hope to withstand her sledge-hammer brother. With a resigned gesture she said:

'Morris will be home any minute. Will you make yourself comfortable, Dave, while I dress?'

Magowan sprawled in a chair before a log fire in the living-room and fell to thinking of friends and shipmates whose lives had been snuffed out by swift disaster. The fortune of war. The hazard of the game. And so soon, so completely forgotten! From his pensive reverie he was aroused

by the jovial voice of his brother-in-law, Morris Wickham. Full-faced, florid, he had been burly in his youth, but was now growing fat. His waistcoat curved more noticeably than when Magowan had last seen him. A man is as young as he feels, was his motto. Keep on smiling and chase the clouds away. He affected bright neckties and Scotch homespun suits. The modest violet was not his favorite flower. All was right and God in his heaven so long as business was unhampered by taxes, strikes, and high wages. America was the home of the brave and the free, and the land of opportunity.

'Why, hello, Dave, old scout, how's tricks?' he exclaimed.

David jumped as if he had sat on a pin. Foolish of him, but he objected to being called 'old scout' by Morris Wickham.

'Thought you'd run up to little old Kensington and give us the once-over?' continued the breezy brother-in-law. 'Watch the wheels go round? You Navy chaps must be leading an easy life these days.'

'I manage to keep busy,' briefly answered the lieutenant commander, nobly resolving to be a pleasant companion. Morris always had set his teeth on edge.

'You come at just the right time, Dave. It must have been a hunch. I meant to dictate a letter to you, but they have me lashed to the mast these days. Orders rolling in to beat the band. And as if the factory wasn't enough, I had to get interested in a lot of welfare work — a better, happier Kensington — the real community spirit. No such thing as spare time any more. That boy Tony was what I wanted to see you about. Not but what he is batting it out all right at the Academy. You can't keep him down. Without flattering myself, he is a chip of the old block, eh, Dave? He is anxious to get out of the Navy after he graduates in June. Did you know that? I approve. There ought to be no trouble in fixing it up. The Congressman of our district is pretty close to the Secretary of the Navy and one of our Senators is a personal friend of mine.'

'I see,' said Magowan. 'Then what is the big idea in talking to me about it?'

'We don't want any fuss or misunderstanding in the family,' explained Morris, with the laugh that chased most clouds away. 'You talked Tony into going to the Academy, remember? He wasn't really old enough to know his own mind. It was before the armistice and we were all full of the hip-hip-hurrah war excitement. The boy

wasn't old enough to be drafted. It was quite the natural impulse for a youngster who had an uncle in the Service. Mind, I am not blaming you.'

'Huh, it sounds like a court-martial,' was the curt comment. The officer's face was as inscrutable as if he sat at a poker table. 'If Tony hadn't been eager to get the appointment, he should have been kicked.'

'Easy now, Dave,' said the father of Midshipman Wickham. 'No sense in holding post-mortems, is there? You can't bully me. This is no quarter-deck. I have worked hard for success. As soon as I break him into the business, Tony can help me make more money. There is no reason why the boy can't be worth a million or two in a few years. I have some big plans on foot and I can put 'em across.'

Magowan gazed at the fire, rubbed his chin, and observed:

'Most officers who resign from the Service are forced out by poverty. They can't afford married life on their pay. This will not be true of Tony. You were willing to have him enter the Academy, weren't you, Morris?'

'How could I look ahead and see that my business would ride along this way? What gave me the big boost, of course, was those war orders,

shells and fuses and parts. I had to enlarge the plant and then find how to use it to develop new business. Changing my mind about Tony doesn't make me any less patriotic, Dave. Don't get me wrong. You know my record in the war. I was chairman of the Liberty Loan drives in this county and you bet I put 'em over the top. And I whirled in and bought bonds myself until it hurt, all right. Then there was the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. — right up to the neck in 'em. You fellows who went across don't realize how much we business men helped win the war.'

'And got rich at it,' said the lieutenant commander with the first evidence of strong feeling. 'Sometimes I wonder why we bothered to send the Army and Navy overseas. To hear some of you smug, gold-plated johnnies talk, it wasn't the poor guys behind the guns that won the war, but the heroes behind the Liberty Bonds and the munitions contracts. I don't mean to be rough, but I have been fed up with that stuff, Morris. It happens to be one of my sore points. Do you know why? Because this country is fairly cluttered up with millionaires whose money is so new that it stinks. Where did they get it? Out of the war or its aftermath. You can't sell that line of talk to a naval officer.'

'I never lose my temper, Dave. It doesn't pay,' was the cheery reply. 'Every morning is a glad new day and every man I meet is my brother. You are bound to take a narrow point of view. That is your professional training. Now about my boy's career. Another thing influenced me. The Navy is on the toboggan. Look what that disarmament conference did to it. The beginning of the end. Listen: The world intends to do away with these big wars. Too expensive. We business men can't stand the burden. No more extravagant navies. Public sentiment will gradually work you out of your jobs.'

David Magowan walked the floor, his demeanor conveying a certain masterful grimness. It was like talking to a stupid child, he perceived. He tried to speak patiently and simply.

'Do you consider that an argument for coaxing your son out of the Navy? Do you fellows read anything in the newspapers but business and the stock-market reports? Do you talk anything but salesmanship and production and overhead? I'd like to shove you out to the Near East for six months in a destroyer. Have you seen Europe? You would get jolly well rid of the notion that every man is your brother. Does the wreckage of civilization amount to a tinker's dam to you as

long as you have unfilled orders on your books? Who put it into your head that the Navy was going out of business? The Navy was never more efficient for war or peace than it is to-day. It has to be. Naval officers are working harder than ever to master their jobs. The country needs them. If you think it is a poor career for your son because there is no money in it, that is not my affair. But don't juggle the facts and blind your eyes like a silly ostrich.'

Morris Wickham was not in the least annoyed. On the contrary, he chuckled with tolerant amusement. This scolding a broad-gauge business man who looked at things from all sides! These Navy men were always kicking up a fuss to scare more money out of Congress to build more ships to make more jobs and quicker promotion.

'I am always open to conviction, Dave, but the question is settled as far as Tony's future is concerned. His mother agrees with me.'

'She didn't use to be that kind, Morris. And so she believes that making money is the only thing worth while?'

'Don't get me wrong, Dave. Better talk it over with her yourself.'

They veered from this topic until Mrs. Wickham joined them. David concluded that he had

made himself disagreeable enough. He would try to sit and look on.

'We were having a frank, red-blooded talk about the boy, Susie,' said her husband. 'Dave doesn't know that I am an expert on boys. The Big Brother movement, old man! I am all wrapped up in it. I am president of the Kensington Boys' Club, and it is a corker. I wish you could attend one of our father-and-son banquets. We are getting the boys in from the street corners and pool-rooms. The proposition is to make good citizens of 'em, Dave. This younger generation is too lawless — no respect for law — partly because their parents have passed the buck and let 'em drift. Nobody takes a real interest in 'em. I wish you could give a talk at the Boys' Club Sunday night — about honor and duty and playing the game and all that.'

David was about to decline the invitation, for he was no public speaker, when the nautical butler, Spud McIntyre, entered the room. His behavior was most formal and correct; not a hint to betray the fact that he was a friend of the lieutenant commander. In fact the former gunner's mate might have been lined up for division inspection. He bore a large tray upon which were glasses, a silver shaker, a bowl of ice, several

bottles, and a siphon of soda. He placed the burden on a table near the fire and stiffly awaited orders.

'A cocktail or a snifter of Scotch, Dave?' asked the jovial Morris.

Magowan said nothing. His sense of humor was stirred. He glanced at the chairman of the Big Brother movement in Kensington, then at his sister, the pious schoolmaster's daughter, finally at the fixed countenance of Spud McIntyre whose left eyelid moved faintly in a furtive wink. It conveyed the message that what the younger generation needed was more respect for the law.

CHAPTER IV

MAGOWAN STROLLS OUT WITH THE BUTLER

INSTEAD of motoring into the country, which Mrs. Wickham had suggested for Sunday afternoon, her brother said that he should prefer, if it wouldn't drive another nail in her coffin, to go out for a walk with the butler. To make a public parade of it was, indeed, trying in the extreme, but Susie Wickham had learned in childhood that argument with David was like peppering a stone wall with a popgun.

It was his orderly habit of mind to review the events of the day after rolling into bed. This he had done after the evening by the fire. He was greatly disappointed in Susie. She had changed a lot in a few years. Drifted away from her moorings. Swept was the better word. Fond of her son, but fonder of the social leadership of Kensington and willing to let her shoddy blowhard of a husband set the pace for her.

From this remark and that, Magowan was able to surmise how young Anthony had spent his time while at home on leave. Girls running after him — a car when he wanted it — coming home

at all hours—keen enough to see that his father's advice was so much windy rot — privately ridiculing his blatant welfare work and feeling more respect for his bootlegger.

There was no harm in a midshipman's eagerness to jazz it up during his brief respites from the shackles of the Academy. David Magowan was no plaster saint. He was ready to make allowance for youth, but he was beginning to discern, to a certain extent, what the trouble was with First Classman Wickham. The boy had much good in him or he would have made a worse mess of it.

It would not do to cross-examine Spud McIntyre. One could not properly encourage a butler to gossip about his employers even though said butler was in the relation of a former chief petty officer, U.S.N. The lieutenant commander, therefore, concluded to let the intelligent Spud offer of his own volition any comments that might be opportune. He had been in the Wickham household during young Anthony's recent September leave.

A well-turned-out young man, with his cane and gloves, was the seagoing butler when Magowan joined him for a stroll along the river-valley road. To raise a barrier of caste between

them would have seemed all nonsense. In this companionship they were old shipmates who had learned greatly to respect and like each other. They had met the sternest tests of life and death together. McIntyre walked with the slight limp that marred the natural briskness of his demeanor.

Presently Magowan said what came first into his thoughts:

'Look here, Spud, no work is ignoble, I suppose, if it is on the level, but it does rub me the wrong way to see you buttling. It makes you a sort of human wart on the face of society. Don't tell me you like it.'

'Well, I find it amusing, sir. I tried other jobs, but I wasn't quite rugged enough.'

'There may be an easy billet for a competent chief petty officer in the Academy yard, Spud. I could use a man like you in my own department of seamanship. Your disability would be no obstacle. I will let you know when I go back. You are not a rummy, are you?'

'Never enough booze to hurt,' was the honest answer. 'No more than my boss laps up before dinner every night. It is number-one liquor, as he says, and with so much of it handy a sailorman is tempted to take a nip now and then. Of course

there was one dance after another when the midshipman came home and nobody had to perish of thirst. But I will say this for the lad, that he kept pretty well off the joy juice. They will never bilge him for that.'

'Glad to hear you say it, Spud. He must have a good many friends in town — the boys and girls he grew up with.'

'Yes, and some are tame and some are wild. Of course his folks wanted him to trail with the ones that have the money and style. It's the land of opportunity for them that has the wad, is the way the old man dopes it out. A queer thing about that. This midshipman's side kicker as a younger lad was named Bernard Crouch. I was raised in Kensington myself. That's how I happened to wander back here. This Bernie Crouch and his twin brother Jack were plain roughnecks, as you might say, sir — decent, honest boys who lived in the mill-tenement district. Their father was a brass founder in the Wickham shops and he is there yet for all I know.

'A hard guy was this "Big John" Crouch and he packed a wallop in both mitts. But there wasn't a crooked hair in his head. He cut some ice in local politics, being boss of the precinct or something, and could deliver some votes. It was

the Congressman that put it in his head to aim one of his boys for West Point. Both these husky twins were boilin' over with ambition to step along in the world. And both of 'em were determined to cop this appointment to the Army Academy.

'They fought over it all through high school, to prove which was the better lad to put on the cadet gray. It was a circus. Big John gave it out that the winner could go and the loser must stay home and learn his trade in the brass foundry. Twins, as I tell you, sir — black-haired, stocky built — and enough sand in their gizzards to scrub a deck with. Alike as two aces, they were one pair of bull terriers. A stand-off it turned out to be between 'em, and Big John had to call it a draw after they had hammered the daylights out of each other for a couple of years. So he told 'em both to go take the examinations for West Point and let their brains instead of their fists decide it. The boys were still sore as crabs at each other.'

Magowan broke into this long story with a question. He had been uncommonly diverted.

'Did they run neck-and-neck in scholarship?'

'Almost. These lads were twins to the *n*th power, the original dead ringers for each other.

When it came to rating the examination papers, Bernard led by no more than an eyelash.'

'And he is at West Point now? By jingo, his name sounds familiar. Crouch? Can that be "Blackie" Crouch, as the Army calls him? The West Point football player?'

'The same armor-plated Crouch twin from Kensington, sir. Bernie it is. The Navy wishes him no bad luck, but if he broke a leg there would be few tears shed, afloat or ashore. Honest, skipper, when that Bernie boy busts into a formation he is one package of TNT. They make 'em no better. He is the goods.'

'I never saw him play,' said Magowan, 'having been far away from the Army-Navy game for two years. Is this his last season?'

'Yes, thank the Lord!' fervently breathed the gunner's mate. 'Here in Kensington he is a bigger man than Admiral Bill Sims. What put me in mind of him was the mention of Midshipman Anthony Wickham. They were in high school together when Tony was sent off to a classy prep school before breakin' into Yale. Then came the war and the deal was switched. Tony went to the Naval Academy, and you had a hand in it, sir. Well, he used to run off and play with the Crouch twins when they were little

tykes. His dad busted that up, Big John in his overalls all daubed up with moulder's clay failing to qualify for the smart set. In high school, though, the boys chummed up again. You couldn't keep 'em apart when they were on the same baseball team and the same eleven.

'Then these buddies blew up with a bang. A girl did it — and she was a little pippin — one of those natural-born young heart-breakers. Her dad ran the flour-and-feed store down by the bridge. I remember this distractin' kid — molasses-colored hair in a thick braid down her back — white dresses with red ribbons and she never rumpled 'em. Just to smile and be admired was her game. And the boys did fall for her, believe me.

'Well, sir, this Bernie Crouch caught a frightful case of chicken love. Brought up as he was, always mixing it up with his twin brother Jack, he was all set to fight for anything he wanted. His pet argument was a punch to the jaw. So now it was him and Tony Wickham that went to the mat. Tony was out in front with the little girl and going strong as the favorite, having the clothes and the manners and the coin to blow. Anyhow, first thing you know the Wickham boy and the Bernie twin were hating each other for

fair. They were both strappin' young guys who took dust from nobody, understand? So here were these pals, split wide open, Bernie sticking to his friends in the mill district and Tony up on the hill among the swells, as you might call 'em.'

'And did they really fight for the damsel fair, Spud?' demanded the lieutenant commander, who found his interest increasing. He was curiously impatient for the climax.

'What else would they do? It had to be. They were fated to bump. Bernie Crouch licked the Wickham lad once and he licked him twice. Did this settle it? I'll say no. Tony refused to call it a decision. Game for punishment? He ate it up. One of those fightin' fools. Once I saw him homeward bound, face all bloodied up, clothes tore off him, cursing to curl your hair, and blubbering that he'd whip Bernie Crouch yet.'

'You mean to say they fought again?'

'They did that and it was a juicy scrap. They fought behind the high board fence of the high-school yard, after hours, with sentries on the gates to prevent the grown-ups from spoiling it. Bare knuckles, a referee, and a second in each corner. They went twelve rounds. Tony Wickham was lugged home in a hack. It was a toss-up whether to take him there or to the hospital.

Bernie Crouch was able to walk home to his old man's shack, but not much more. Pretty near total ruins, both of 'em, but Tony Wickham had been trimmed again. A swing to the jaw knocked him for a row of ash cans. But there was no yellow in him. He was there till he dropped.'

'And that ended it?' asked Magowan. 'Was he convinced that Bernie Crouch could lick him?'

'Convinced? Why not? Would you want him to get hit with a club? Did you ever happen to notice the scar on his chin? A souvenir of that last battle. And he has no reason to be ashamed of it.'

'Um-m, Spud, and what about the woman in the case?'

'Oh, the fickle little chicken! Bernie was so bunged up and awful to look at that she ditched him for the other twin, Jack. Bernie let her go by default. He pined for a peaceful life. Last I heard of her she was eighteen years old and had married a vaudeville actor.'

The loquacious narrator thought it time to give his voice a rest. He felt flattered by the attention with which his commander had heard him through. Magowan had no more to say until they had walked perhaps a hundred yards. Then he spoke up suddenly.

'McIntyre, did you ever hear of a complex?'

'A rowdy fireman hit me in the solar complex one time when I caught him in the ship's pantry. I never want to hear of it again.'

'This kind is worse, I am told. It is something like being shipmates with a ghost. This Bernie Crouch plays at tackle on the West Point team? You are sure of that?'

'Yes, sir. I saw the game last year. Right tackle. The same position for two seasons. They won't be apt to shift him.'

'Probably not. Tell me, Spud, can we find this twin brother, Jack Crouch?'

'Right away? Sure, unless he has rambled somewhere for the day off. I'd like to say howdy to him and Big John. No danger of mistakin' the twins one for the other nowadays. When Bernie comes home on leave he carries the West Point brace — gray clothes fit him like the paper on the wall; all his rough corners knocked off; one fine young soldier. But he is never ashamed of the old man or the dump he was raised in. And the brothers swear by each other.'

'Let's go,' said Magowan.

McIntyre glanced at him with an air of amused perplexity, but held his peace. He had been trained to jump at the word when the skipper

gave an order. The truth was that Magowan had no clear idea of how this odd errand might turn out. Outwardly stolid as he was, however, there was in him that quality of imagination which we call vision. It is the gift vouchsafed men of action that carries them to leadership.

A very small issue, perhaps, for this veteran destroyer commander to be so concerned about — certain flaws in a midshipman who was bound to him by ties of blood — but it was not in him to shirk any task that he had set his hand to.

A few minutes' walk led the lieutenant commander and the gunner's mate away from the pleasant valley road into narrow streets, some of them unkempt, where the small houses were close together. Many were shabby for lack of paint. Long rows of them, near the Morris Wickham Company's plant, were of flimsy, war-time construction, knocked together to serve an emergency. The grime of soft-coal smoke had made them look forlorn.

It was a contrast, grateful and unexpected, to find a little low-roofed white cottage, relic of old New England, set behind a flower garden and a picket fence. It recalled to memory a sweeter, cleaner era before the turbid wash of industrialism had submerged the rest of the colonial ham-

let of ancient Kensington. In the yard a broad, swarthy man was raking leaves. His grizzled head was bare, his sleeves rolled up to disclose a mighty forearm. The rough-hewn features expressed a massive good nature, but the chin was like a rock.

'How are you, John?' said Spud McIntyre. 'Still puny and spindlin', I see. Shake hands with Captain Magowan. Is your Jack about?'

Big John Crouch gripped the officer's fingers, rumbled an amiable word or two, and said to the gunner's mate:

'This must be the Captain Magowan you were blown to glory with in a warship, Mac. I read in a paper about it. A good record you made. But I hear bad things of you, Mac. Young Jack is in the barn yonder tinkerin' with a bunch of junk he calls a second-hand car. I will call him out. Have you seen Bernie, my other twin, play football, Captain Magowan?'

'Not yet, but I shall be on deck for the Army game this year.'

'You'll see something. I went myself last year, but I must not go again. The Navy put the boots to us, but it was no fault of Bernie's. I got so excited that I slapped a brittle-looking old gentleman between the shoulders — he had the

next seat to me — and he yelled for a cop. I guess I started his rivets and injured him for life. Now I'm sorry I didn't let Jack go to West Point. The pair of 'em might have stood the Navy on its head.'

Young Jack just then appeared from the barn door. He wore a sleeveless undershirt and khaki trousers. He was much less massively muscular than his father and moved with a lighter step. A refined edition, more efficient and intelligent, reflected the critical naval officer. The Crouches were not conspicuously tall men. This black-eyed twin was perhaps five feet ten. He was built much as was Magowan. He conveyed a similar impression of reserve force and resolution.

His manner had a trace of boyish shyness as he came forward and was introduced. The West Point twin, no doubt, had taught him to feel respect for military rank. His gaze was very frank and level, however; the untroubled gaze of a young man who met life gallantly.

'I thought I should like to get acquainted with Bernie Crouch by proxy,' smiled Magowan. 'It is unusual to find that a celebrity has a double.'

'You lose,' replied Jack. 'I am the family dub. Nobody walks around the block to have a look at me.'

'Barring the book-learnin' and the drill,' boomed the proud father, 'this twin is every bit as good as the other one. And he will go ahead faster at his trade than ever I did. They will make a superintendent of him some day. There's ambition in him.'

'And the steam,' said Magowan. 'Now that your brother is such a whale of a football player, Jack, can he get the better of you in a rough-house?'

'Not so you would notice it,' was the easy answer. 'I don't let myself get soft. And I took up boxing a while ago. I like it. When I tear into Bernie with the mitts he finds there are more tricks to it than he ever learned in football.'

'A crowd of these young huskies have some grand bouts in the barn,' explained Big John. 'I got brash one day and put on the gloves with Jack. He poked me into the middle of next week. It was a dirty crime, Captain Magowan. He bounced 'em off my slats and pushed my nose to one side till I got him in a clinch. Then I made him holler murder for abusing his poor old father.'

'Listen, Captain Magowan,' said Jack Crouch, who was not one to beat about the bush. 'What made you think you wanted to see me? I'm not

Bernie. What's the idea? It's an honor, all right, but you've got me guessing.'

'McIntyre told me a good deal about you, Jack. Perhaps I hope to persuade you to enlist in the Navy. I always keep an eye open for the right kind of young men.'

'I may take you on, some day, but I'll have to knock dad cold before I can make him listen.'

'I had another reason,' resumed Magowan. 'I was anxious to size up the pattern of a lad who could lick Anthony Wickham. He happens to be my nephew.'

'Watch me alibi myself out of that,' laughed Jack, in mock terror. 'Not guilty. It was Bernie that used to lam the life out of Tony Wickham. You've got us mixed. Tony and I got on all right.'

'Could you have done as well as Bernie if it had come to a show-down with my esteemed nephew?'

'It sounds chesty, but I guess so. What I mean is that Bernie and I broke about even in most any old stunt. It would have made you laugh to see us fight to a draw, time and again. Dad still calls us the "Nip-and-Tuck Twins."'

'Most extraordinary,' exclaimed Magowan. 'So you liked Tony Wickham?'

'Why not? He had all kinds of class. That was when I knew him, understand? His head has swelled some since he went away to Annapolis. All I see of him now is a flash when he buzzes by in a red speed wagon. You ought to know, Captain Magowan, if you are his uncle.'

'Yes, I am stationed at the Naval Academy, Jack. Tony has played football there for the last two years, but he couldn't stay on the team.'

'So I heard. He was a substitute tackle at the Army game last year. Bernie saw him on the side lines. There is something I can't figure out at all. Tony Wickham ought to be as good a football player as my brother and a shade better. He is taller and faster and he thinks quicker. On our high-school team he had the edge on Bernie right along.'

'And Tony can stand the gaff, do you think, Jack?'

'He used to. You couldn't make him squeal. I saw him finish a game with a broken wrist.'

'Will you come into the house, Captain Magowan?' asked Big John Crouch. 'I am sorry the missus is out palaverin' with the neighbors.'

'Please give her my regards and congratulations as the mother of the Nip-and-Tuck Twins. Thank you, but I don't want to keep Jack from

his invalid car, so I'll drift into the barn with him for a little while. I have a consumptive tin Lizzie myself that I run around Annapolis in. Perhaps Jack can tell me how to stop her hollow cough.'

'He is a handy lad at most anything,' said the father as he picked up his wooden rake. 'Here, you McIntyre. Fetch the bushel basket and buttle this pile of leaves.'

Once in the barn Magowan began to give expert advice instead of asking it. This was bound to happen. The fatal fascination of trying to make a sulky motor behave lured him on. Presently he pulled off his coat and cranked her while Jack tested the spark plugs. More exertion and earnest discussion, and the engine came to life with a startling clatter.

Then it was another two-man job to put in a new brake rod. This accomplished, Magowan washed his hands in gasoline and sat down on a bench. He had enjoyed himself. Jack Crouch's cordial attitude implied that this dignified naval officer was accepted as a regular guy, even if he was the brother of Morris Wickham's wife. Magowan was ready to return the compliment. The Crouch twin was of the breed he had learned to swear by in the naval service.

In a way the purpose of the errand had been

achieved, to find out what kind of a youngster had been able to vanquish Anthony Wickham. The motive of the quest had become deeper and more subtle than this. The nebulous surmise, which had seemed so fantastic, was now more like a conviction. The midshipman had suffered much more than physical damage. It had been, in truth, a spiritual disaster. The fine edge of his courage had been dulled. Yes, it could be called a complex for lack of a better word.

Very possibly the midshipman was not clearly aware of it in his own heart or he refused to admit it to himself. But there it was. Aye, a specter of fear which he was unable to banish. It was unwillingness to match himself against the formidable Bernie Crouch on the football field, to put it to the supreme test with the West Point tackle whose prowess had increased to such heroic proportions.

This would account for Tony's brilliant playing early in the season and his later failures which had so baffled the coach and the other football observers. In this present season it seemed to explain why he had so easily resigned himself to being regarded as a fixture in the second eleven. He knew that another struggle with the phantom enemy of fear, with the sense

of inferiority, would be hopeless and unavailing. He was whipped before he started.

This was a profoundly tragic hypothesis, but it could not be dismissed. Strength and weakness dwell together in every human soul. The heel of Achilles was vulnerable.

David Magowan felt a pitiful commiseration for his nephew. The boy must have suffered the torments of the damned. He was too finely organized to have offered passive resistance to this crippling obsession. The past is never dead and done for. It waits in ambush to strike without warning.

CHAPTER V

THE CROUCH TWIN GETS ACTION

YOUNG JACK CROUCH straightened his sturdy back, grunted, and announced that he was off the old car for the day. Tease her any more and she might turn peevish again. While putting away his tools he remarked:

'A friend of mine promised to drop in for a little work-out with the gloves. We usually mix it up Sunday afternoon unless one of us is going somewhere. Looks as if he has went.'

'I am sorry to miss it,' said Magowan. 'You ought to be worth the price of admission. I imagine your father isn't yearning to take you on again.'

'That goes both ways,' laughed Jack. 'You see, I can hold him off me only so long. The barn floor isn't big enough for fast footwork. When he wraps those arms around me, it's good-night. He's a bear. That time he was telling you about I did muss up his old mug, but he cracked two of my ribs.'

Magowan glanced beyond the car and saw the space where the floor had been cleared. Upon a

shelf was a discolored set of boxing-gloves. It was too bad that the Crouch twin should have to be deprived of his customary Sunday afternoon scrap. The lieutenant commander drew a long breath. His eye kindled. Here was a temptation not to be resisted. Some years had passed since he had won a boxing championship at the Naval Academy. However, he had managed to keep himself hard and fit. It was one of his habits. In the American officers' clubhouse at Brest, during the war, he had won the decision over a reserve lieutenant reputed to be a very clever light heavyweight, for an amateur.

'Did you ever box, Captain Magowan?' asked the sociable Jack. 'The finest sport there is, I'll tell the world.'

'Right you are. I was just saying that very thing to myself. Yes, I did a good deal of it when I was younger.'

'You have had to ease up, of course,' observed Jack with the tolerant sympathy of extreme youth for decrepit middle age.

'Oh, I don't know about that,' came the brisk retort. 'I am fairly spry for thirty-five. I don't have to use a crutch and my teeth are my own.'

'Excuse me, sir, I didn't mean to kid you.' The Crouch twin blushed for his lack of tact. He

hesitated, reluctant to presume too far. Magowan said it for him.

'Yes, thank you. I shall be delighted. I feel like working off steam this afternoon. Of course, you will have mercy on an old man and be careful to pull your punches.'

'I don't know so much about that,' grinned young Jack. 'Maybe I said something foolish.'

Magowan pulled off his shirt. He drew his leather belt a notch tighter. It bounded no convex curve such as the equator of beefy Morris Wickham displayed.

'You surely do strip well,' exclaimed the surprised twin. 'No excess baggage. Pull my punches? I guess not. Here's where I *have* started something.'

He did not know that the methodical naval officer was carrying his investigations to the logical end. He would discover for himself why a Crouch twin was such a hard nut to crack. The result might be painful, but it would have its uses. At the worst he would be in the frame of mind to understand the feelings of a certain unlucky midshipman. 'Put yourself in his place' was sound doctrine. The conscientious lieutenant commander viewed this bout with mixed emotions — personal pleasure and altruistic duty.

For a man whose movements were usually deliberate, who appeared heavy when in repose, it was astonishing to see how gracefully he handled himself once the gloves were laced on his wrists. He stepped with easy assurance, no trace of the stiffness of years, eye like a hawk, mouth set in a straight line, the poise, the dynamic readiness of the fighting man. He appeared to be much younger than he really was.

Young Jack Crouch watched him warily while they feinted and blocked and shifted and vigilantly appraised each other. None of the Kensington lads who came to the barn possessed the seasoned experience and power of this old-timer of a Captain Magowan. This could be read in the first swift and harmless exchange of blows. Undismayed, the Crouch twin shook his head, ducked a glove that whizzed past his ear, and determined to hammer at his antagonist's wind and wear him out.

They went about it in the friendliest spirit, with boyish zest and not the slightest sign of ill temper. Two good sportsmen were finding royal entertainment. A wicked jab to the face made Jack's teeth rattle. He winced and laughed, driving hard for the stomach. Magowan emitted an anguished 'whoof' and clapped a hand to his

belt. A little better aim and he would have suffered from one of Spud McIntyre's solar complexes.

They agreed to call it a round and take a brief rest. Into the barn came Big John Crouch and McIntyre. Immediately they were intensely interested spectators who demanded ringside seats.

'I heard the scuffle of shoes and a couple of honest swats when I stepped to the side door,' said the father of the twins. 'My money is on you, Captain Magowan. I hope you knock Jack's block off.'

'Hold the watch, will you, dad?' suggested the unterrified offspring.

'I will. And Mac here will fetch a towel and a bucket of water. I have a notion you may need 'em.'

'Oh, it's all in fun, dad, old sport. Don't get excited.'

'Huh, it was fun you and me had on this same barn floor. My fine, straight nose will never be the same again. You are up against the American Navy this time, boy, and I hope he sinks you.'

'No chance,' said Magowan. 'He will have me groggy in a few rounds. Youth is a precious advantage in this game.'

Spud McIntyre wore a dubious air and refused to be jocular. Here was his august commander, a salt-water dictator, scrapping for all he was worth with a rough young guy from the foundry. What if Jack Crouch should knock him out or something like that? The honor of the Service was at stake.

'Time!' bellowed Big John.

The first round had been in the nature of a preliminary skirmish. When they faced each other again, it was to be noted that neither was smiling. It was not hostility, this serious behavior, but the intense concentration of two men who by nature did with all their might whatever the Lord gave them to do. Neither one could be accused of the dilettante spirit. Thus it was that David Magowan had played football. Thus it was that Bernie Crouch, the other twin, had stormed through the rush line for West Point.

Big John smacked his lips. This Captain Magowan was a *man*, by gorry, and he knew how to fight. No waste motion. Shoulders working as smooth as a turret lathe. Paternal love and family pride began to assert their sway.

'I dunno,' muttered Big John. 'It would be a feather in the lad's cap if he could give this hard-boiled Navy man a bellyful. Seems as if I hadn't

ought to go back on my own kid. Hooray! You rocked him that time, Jack. Now whirl in before he gets set.'

Magowan chuckled at this change of colors. He had broken away and was sparring for time while his head cleared. He was dizzy and a smear on his cheek showed where the skin was broken. The impetuous twin came rushing in, both hands flying. Magowan steadied himself and smote the unguarded chin. The blow was clean and savage, with weight behind it.

The astonished Jack was lifted from his feet. He swayed, reeled backward, vainly tried to recover himself, and crashed into a barrel near the wall from which he rebounded and sprawled his length on the floor. Above him towered Big John, watch in hand, thunderstruck, but faithful to his task — rolling out the seconds in a tremendous voice.

'One — two — three — get up, you bag of mush — four — five — is this what I raised you for, you paper-backed pup — will you let me count you out — six — seven —'

The prostrate twin rolled over and scrambled to his feet. Leaning against the barrel, he scowled and rubbed his eyes. He wore the dazed expression of a man who had been kicked point-

blank by a mule. Head down, he moved forward, slowly, as though his will pulled him along. Damaged but intrepid, he was anxious to renew the battle. He might have echoed with John Paul Jones that he had not begun to fight.

'Damn close to a fade-out,' he muttered thickly. 'Take that horseshoe out of your mitt.'

Magowan's set features lighted in a smile. No wonder poor Tony Wickham had found it bitter conflict with a Crouch twin. Jack was no longer impetuous. In this chastened mood he was more dangerous. His tactics indicated that he intended to avoid more collisions with that sledge-hammer fist. He kept Magowan moving after him. Gradually the agility and elusive swiftness came back. And then the crafty Magowan maneuvered it to force him into a corner. There was no slipping away. Jack Crouch had to stand up to it, give-and-take, hammer and tongs.

When Big John roared the summons to call it another round, neither combatant objected. Magowan was breathing hard. To himself he confessed that the ordeal had aged him rapidly. One eye was half-closed, giving him a tipsy aspect. His nose was bleeding. The Crouch twin showed puffy bruises on the side of his face, a

scarlet welt on the neck. But he seemed fresh and undaunted and eager for more.

'What do you say, Captain Magowan?' he queried. 'How about another round or two? I am learning a few things, let me tell you.'

'You are a sincere pupil, Jack. It's rough on the teacher, but let's go to it.'

'Which is what I expected to hear,' said Big John. He seemed thoroughly contented with the programme of entertainment. 'I am an impartial referee, but dig your fist into his brisket, Jack, and chop at his sore nose. I know how it will make him feel. You done the same to me.'

The experienced Magowan realized that the rugged tenacity of youth might soon turn the tide. Also, the Crouch twin was in finer condition. He had been tuned up by frequent boxing-matches. He displayed remarkable skill and judgment for a young amateur. Evidently the twins had a natural aptitude for the fighting game.

Jack Crouch had not the remotest idea of quitting. This was obvious enough. He would insist on one more round as long as he could stand on his feet. Life, as he saw it, consisted in proving who was the better man. As for Lieutenant Commander David Magowan, he felt it urgently necessary that he should win this argument. He

was almost superstitious about it. He did not propose to risk having *his* confidence in himself shaken, the luster of his courage dimmed, by one of these devastating Crouch twins. He would be ashamed to look his midshipman nephew in the face.

'Time's up. Sick 'em!' announced Big John.

Late in this same evening he was still relating to one group of wondering neighbors after another the epic of the glove fight in the barn, and its unforgettable climax. When he told them about the last round there was awe in his voice and his harsh, square visage took on a reverential expression.

'They wasn't mad at each other,' said he, 'and it was real gentlemanly all the way. Not a foul blow was struck. Neither one tried to bite, gouge, or kick, like some of you plug-uglies in an election-day shindy. Up they come again for the third round. Three rounds — that was all they went and it was plenty. This last round they just stood in the middle of the floor and swapped punches. Jack was doing his honest best to batter the captain to a fare-ye-well. The captain was tryin' as hard to land with one of them six-inch shells of his. Man, man, if the Bernie twin could have been there to see it!

'They couldn't last long at that pace. I was so interested that I clean forgot about holdin' the watch on 'em. I dunno how many minutes it went. What was the difference? You couldn't ha' pried 'em away from each other.

'The captain begun to sag. He was there with the science, but it was comin' too fast for a man almost twice the kid's age. But Jack couldn't put him out or make him holler. It was like poundin' away at so much boiler iron. But the Navy was whipped. It was a dollar to a plugged nickel on the twin. The Navy was shaky on his legs and wheezing like a leaky suction valve. And Jack was rippin' into him like a bobcat.

'The Navy retreated, slow and stubborn, till he was back in the corner, still firing guns, but shy of powder. Jack he flashed a look at me that said, "Dad, it's all over but the hoorah. This old bird is tough, but he's got to take it."

'*Then*, by gorry, what do you think happened? The Navy got its second wind or a dying flurry or something. I thought I was dreamin'. He let go one broadside after another. He sent 'em crashin' at Jack till the boy was shot to pieces before he knew it. I tell you, the captain was givin' more than he had in him. It wasn't human.

'This kid of mine is tough as rawhide and strong as a bull, but he just crumpled up. It wasn't one punch that put him out. First thing I knew he was down on the floor with his hands to his face and the tears runnin' through his fingers. He couldn't get up. I stared at him kind of dumb and foolish. It made me feel kind of stewed up inside and my eyes got wet. First time one of the twins ever got flattened out like that. And they have met all comers since they was knee-high to a duck.

'While I blinked and cussed myself for a silly old woman, the captain sort of tottered from over against the wall where he had propped himself. And he reached down and got his arm under Jack and hauled him to his feet. Then he wrapped his arms around him and dragged him to the bench. And I held the boy's head while the captain got the towel and the bucket of water. Between us we doused the boy and washed him off. Pretty soon he could sit up by himself.

'He wasn't cut up as much as you'd expect, but at that he was a sight to make his mother throw a fit. The captain was no prize beauty, by gorry, with his comical eye and a split lip and so on. But he found a place to sit beside the boy

and he shook his hand and said, "No hard feeling, is there, Jack? It was the finest afternoon I have enjoyed since the war quit on us."

'The Jack twin spit out a tooth and mumbles back at him, "How the devil did the war last two years if you were in it?"'

At this point in his story, the father of the Jack twin snuffled and pretended to blow his nose before he concluded:

'I never thought I could feel proud of a boy that had just had the tar licked out of him. But I'm as proud of Jack to-night as I was of Bernie when the papers called him the greatest player on the West Point football team.'

Toward sunset David Magowan and his former shipmate, Spud McIntyre, might have been seen slowly wending their way in the direction of the Wickham house on the hill. The limping butler had linked arms with the elder man who walked as though hampered by severe rheumatic twinges. His firm and serious countenance was in need of repairs. It had been in collision with something. Passers-by conjectured that these two might be victims of an automobile accident.

Curious to say, the elder man was in cheerful

spirits. One eye was in semi-eclipse, but the other gleamed with some inward satisfaction. He talked with a little difficulty because of a lip which was larger than normal. A most disgraceful plight for a naval officer of considerable rank and distinction, but he did not appear to think so. His companion was the anxious one of the pair. Apprehension clouded his brow. As a chief gunner's mate of U.S.S. Tarpon he had faced the perils of the war zone with far more *sang-froid* than he now displayed. His commander was moved to remark:

'Buck up, Spud. It is not *your* face that hurts. You are towing *me* into port with my upper works stove up.'

'Yes, sir,' sighed McIntyre, 'but it happened when I was on escort duty, in my own home waters. Just wait till we return to the base and go against the board of inquiry.'

'Oh, I get you,' chuckled Magowan. 'Mr. Morris Wickham and my sister! I shall clear you of all blame. As senior officer of the division I assume the responsibility for the action fought during the present cruise.'

'Thank you. It was more like a liberty party. Remember the night Tom Farley, the water-tender, hit the beach in Bordeaux? He had taken

a violent dislike to the whole French nation and tried to exterminate 'em in the little blue wine-shop on the quay. He looked a lot worse than you do when the Navy patrol dug him out from under the ruins.'

'You are still low in your mind, Spud. What else troubles you? Out with it.'

'Not downhearted, but sort of wondering, sir. You felt that you *had* to trim Jack Crouch if it was your last act on earth. I saw you look like that when the ship got afire close to the magazine and you led the gang below with the hose. But this sociable scrap was a mighty little stunt to make you set your teeth like that. All it looked like to me was a session with the gloves between two men that had no grudge and were evenly matched. The boy had you all in—you couldn't beat his twenty years—but you came back with the do-or-die stuff and copped him. What stake were you playing for? Why was it? That's what razzles me. I don't like to be left up a tree.'

'Call it a primitive instinct,' was the evasive answer. 'There are times when we don't understand ourselves. Undignified, was it? Not the proper thing for me to do? Is that bothering you?'

'No. An officer and gentleman doesn't have to

fuss himself over such matters as that. He knows.'

'It will console you, Spud, to learn that I feel ever so much better for this afternoon's diversion. It has put me one step nearer to solving a problem.'

'I hope it's no harder to solve than young Jack Crouch was. One more problem like him would put you plumb out of commission.'

They parted in the driveway, McIntyre to seek the rear entrance and don the black clothes and stiff white linen of his professional duties which would seem more insipid than ever after this turbulent interlude. It was Magowan's intention to steal to his room and comfort himself with a hot bath and arnica. However, his sister spied his unostentatious entrance and hailed him from the fireside. He advanced with a timidity strange in a man of courage. Morris appeared from another room, clutching the comic section of a Sunday newspaper.

They stared at the culprit, who fidgeted, nursed his contused lip, and uneasily surveyed them with his one good eye. Mrs. Wickham fired the first volley.

'Good Heavens, Dave, you are a sight! What in the name of — Morris dear, *do* look at him.'

'I am looking, Susie. He seems to be sober. Ha, ha, Dave, what does the other fellow look like?'

'Not quite so decorative, Morris, but a trifle bizarre, at that. I refuse to incriminate myself. It might sound boastful. Now if you will be good enough to excuse me while —'

'But you *must* tell us!' cried Susie Wickham, grasping his arm. 'It was bad enough to have you go trailing off with the butler. Now see what he led you into — bad company of some sort.'

'And you ballyragged me last night, Dave, you ruffian, about law and order,' put in Morris, who was crimson with eagerness to hear the scandalous details. 'A lovely example, to preach at a man like *me*.'

'I have been engaged in welfare work, down in the mill district,' blandly explained Lieutenant Commander Magowan. 'Welfare work for boys, Morris. The Big Brother movement. I think I made a hit.'

'Quit your joshing!' shouted Mr. Wickham.

'I thank you. We shall meet at dinner. Until then try to think kindly of the outcast brother and the unreconstructed butler.'

CHAPTER VI

THE PLEBE WHO STARTED SOMETHING

Midshipman Wickham, having resigned himself to being shoved into the football discard, was freed of a certain amount of nervous wear and tear. That merciless taskmaster, ambition, no longer goaded him. The Navy had erased him from the list of die-hards who could be trusted to stand in the last ditch against the Army's assaults.

Well, he couldn't help it. He had tried ever since plebe year and the verdict had condemned him. What shattered his assumed armor of indifference and thrust itself like a spear into his soul was to hear the regiment, massed on the bleachers to watch the football practice, singing 'Anchors Aweigh.' The ringing anthem rolled across Farragut Field, the song that homesick officers sang together in the wardrooms of gray cruisers on the South American coast, in sweating gunboats of the Yangtze patrol, in lean destroyers anchored in the Golden Horn.

Stand, Navy, down the field,
Sails set to the sky.
We'll never change our course,
Army, you fight shy-y-y-y.

Derby Powell, the rangy, tenacious plebe who had been selected as first choice for this tackle position, was determined that nobody should oust him from it. He was in much faster football company than when he had made a reputation in the small Baptist college of an Ohio farming region. This dashing, resourceful Navy squad, coached by a master hand, with its crafty veteran players of many a bruising contest, made him seem, indeed, clumsy and slow-witted. But he was learning day by day and nothing could make him flinch.

The girls would never rave about him as a perfectly fascinating midshipman. It was no fault of the Academy tailor that his uniform wrinkled and sagged on his long, slightly round-shouldered frame. Company officers might bark insults at him, but he could not seem to acquire the brace and snap of his comrades in the ranks. He was splotched with freckles, his hair was dry and sandy, and his hands and feet were too large to be disposed of with grace.

A rough diamond was Derby Powell, and therefore his first year at the Naval Academy was certain to bring much tribulation and many hard knocks. The older classmen were bound by tradition and their duty to the *esprit de corps* of

the place to school Derby Powell in many things not found in the textbooks or section rooms. The rougher the diamond the more assiduously he had to be rubbed and polished.

It was not in the childish, bullying spirit of the college sophomore toward the bewildered freshman, but an obligation to be expressed in terms of the equation, *officer and gentleman*. It was the essence and the ichor of the Service as transmitted from one generation to the next.

This intricate code of sentiment and behavior, which was not set down in the official regulations, was particularly irksome to a plebe like Derby Powell who had enjoyed the happy-go-lucky environment of a college campus where he had cut a considerable figure. He took it harder and was less pliable than younger midshipmen fresh from school. On the Academy football field he was a commanding figure, a player whom the regiment regarded as sensational, who was cheered when he trotted into line. In Bancroft Hall he became a wretched, uneasy plebe who was told he ought to thank God that he was permitted to exist. At any moment, as he legged it along a corridor, an upper classman was likely to halt him and rip out:

'Are you a midshipman? I never guessed it.

Well, where did you come from and who let you in? Here you come slouching along all caved in with your hat on the back of your konk like a politician. Pull in that chin. Push out your chest. What does a salute look like? Suffering Mike, you are the original swabo. Go back to your padded cell and bone up on the little green book of naval etiquette. You pollute the scenery. Step out.'

Now it would not have been readily suspected that rawboned, homely Derby Powell had nerves and sensitive feelings. He appeared to be proof against the slings and arrows of oppression. Alas, he lacked a sense of humor which might have made the daily crosses easier to bear.

He was working ferociously to earn passing marks in his courses. In mathematics he had been poorly prepared. The midshipman who is weak at 'Skinny,' as they call it, is in danger of finding his name on the 'Christmas tree,' or record of failures. Derby Powell had never imagined that classes could be so exacting and remorseless as these section rooms in which there could be no bluffing or scraping through a recitation. You knew the thing or you didn't. College had been a fool's paradise beside this daily inquisition. He fought off discouragement, but there were nights

when his head ached and the pages he pored over were blurred, and he felt hopeless of lasting through plebe year.

He had expected to find relaxation at the meals in the vast mess hall, but this was a plebe's delusion. He was privileged to sit at one of the training-tables with the football squad. Even there he enjoyed no exemption from the details of the unwritten code which was presumed to be good for his manners and his morals.

It was a sight to see the twenty-four hundred midshipmen come flooding into this room thrice daily, marching from formation on the terrace, inspected from shoes to collars and buttons, blue-clad phalanxes of splendid youth. In so many eddies they swirled around the long tables. A signal and they settled in the chairs with a noise of talk and laughter and a prodigious rattle of plates and glasses.

Strange names for food were hurled to and fro, 'slum' and 'redeye,' 'collision mats' and 'shivering Liz.' A table at one end of the hall might start a cheer to encourage the football squad, '*Beat Penn State, Beat Penn State.*' It ran from table to table, all the way down and back again like the beat of surf, with a rhythmic clapping of hands that suggested fusillades of rifle fire. The

duty officer sat at his table in the middle of the hall, with his midshipman staff, and enjoyed the jovial tumult. He knew that it could be checked by raising a hand. It was a safety valve blowing off surplus steam.

The plebes sat stiff and solemn on their chairs, flanked by upper classmen. They smiled not nor spoke unless spoken to. To fill the glasses, to pass the bread and butter, meekly to accept the admonitions of their elders, this it was their blighted lot to endure. Another year and they would be dealing out the same salutary doctrines to the next flock of plebes. It was all in the game.

Derby Powell bitterly disliked this parental oversight. He turned sulky under it. This, of course, made it so much worse for him. Facing him across the table sat First Classman Anthony Wickham. It was unfortunate. Wickham, who was human in feeling, had no great affection for the rugged plebe who had supplanted him as a football player. It was a congenial task to help sandpaper the rough edges of Derby Powell. At the table, therefore, the dialogue was apt to take such a slant as this:

'Attention, Powell. Look intelligent. Who is the commander-in-chief of the Pacific fleet?'

'I don't know. You tell me, Wickham.'

'*Mister* Wickham, you dumb-bell. Find out and report at supper. Which battleships carry sixteen-inch guns?'

'No instructor gave me that dope. I'm not a Navy department.'

'Careful, Powell, or you'll be sorry. How many years has the Navy licked West Point in football?'

'You can search me, *Mister* Wickham. I'm darned sure, though, that *you* didn't help.'

Such an affront from a plebe was unbearable. It was promptly decreed that he should finish his dinner 'sitting on infinity.' This meant pulling his chair from under him and ordering him to remain in the same posture until he had gobbled his saucer of bread pudding. It was difficult, but not painful for a young man strong in the back and legs to sit upon nothing for a few minutes. He obeyed, glowering at Wickham and filled with a sense of injustice.

Another plebe, at the next table, took him aside after dinner and suggested, with friendly intentions:

'Listen, Powell, these men will ride you to death if you don't can that grouch. It's all right for them to ask questions about the Service and the Academy athletics. You ought to know, or

try to learn. Don't be so blamed disagreeable about it. Take it smiling and they will let you alone.'

'Haven't I got enough stuff to learn?' growled Derby Powell. 'It's hazing, that's what, forbidden by act of Congress.'

'Oh, punk! No more hazing than I got in the stock room of a wholesale grocer's where I worked a year while I was waiting for my appointment. Gosh, you have to be civil and polite in this old world, 'specially when you are the under dog.'

'I don't like it,' sullenly insisted Powell. 'A few more cracks like sitting without any chair under me and I'll get sore on this place.'

Because this embittered plebe was tired and worried and not yet shaken down, he brooded more than was good for him. He had no gift of making friends. It was an eternal round of study and recitation and football. In this depressed humor, nursing his grievances, he smouldered along for several days. Then came a new provocation.

At supper he left his spoon in a cup of cocoa. He was unaware, perhaps, that this was a breach of table manners. A vigilant second classman bawled out:

'Hi, there, plebe, man overboard!'

The rebuke was repeated along the table, 'Man overboard, plebe. Throw him a life buoy.'

Powell glared at them, perplexed, until he saw the fingers aimed at his cup. He turned red and fished out the spoon. Tony Wickham murmured loud enough to be overheard:

'That's nothing. It was out cutlasses and board when he juggled the beans on his knife yesterday.'

'That will be about all from you, Wickham, you big hunk of football cheese,' blurted the enraged Derby Powell. 'You don't have to tell *me* how to behave at table, understand?'

'But somebody has to, really,' began Tony Wickham with elaborate courtesy.

'Oh, submarine the gink,' put in another voice. 'It's about time. Keep an eye on the duty officer, you fellows.'

'Happy idea,' agreed Tony Wickham. 'Finish your supper under the table, Powell, you boob. It's where you belong.'

The plebe was about to refuse. It was a degradation — the last straw. He was not a man to lose his head, however, and here the odds were all against him. He was unable to defy the opinion of the mass. It constrained him like a prison wall.

His anger ebbed. He felt tremendously aggrieved and hurt. He sat staring dumbly, first at one young tyrant, then at another.

Their accusations cut him deeper than the punishment of 'submarining.' They had reflected on his home, on his folks, on his bringing-up. To slur his careless use of a spoon or a knife! Without a word he slid from his chair and vanished beneath the table.

There was no intention of interfering with his rations. Presently a first classman peered down and cheerily called:

'Pass up the plate for more grub, plebe. They have to be fed, even under hatches in a submarine.'

When Derby Powell marched to his room for the evening study period, he sat idly at the table for some time. The books were untouched. His head was propped between his hands. At length he followed an impulse as old as the world, to tell his troubles to his mother. He would not write in any whining tone if he could help it. She ought to be forewarned if he should decide to quit the naval Academy. Somehow he didn't seem to fit into the scheme, apart from football.

Perhaps it had been a mistake to leave Mount Bethel College. It was not too late to go back there.

He had never felt very close to his father. It had always been much easier to talk things over with his mother. She understood. He wrote the letter slowly, anxious to be fair to the Naval Academy:

DEAR MOTHER: You will be waiting to hear how I have been getting along since my last letter. My studies still come hard and worry me a good deal, but they haven't bilged me yet. What worries me more is being a plebe. I ought not to say much about it to you, but it is a dog's life for fair. I never did know I could get nervous, but I don't sleep as well as I did and my appetite is falling off some.

They have done some hazing to me and it looks as if they meant to keep it up. I am not the fresh kind nor am I a green kid that has to be spanked. And it gets my goat to be hazed. Never mind, other plebes have lived through it and you know I am pretty husky. It makes me feel better to unload it on you. I sort of feel that way to-night.

Football is going great. It is too good to last and I am afraid I may blow up by the middle of the season. If things don't go right for me, they will let me resign from the Academy, I think. Some of the midshipmen do, and it is nothing against them. You have to be a certain type of material to make a naval officer. And of course you can't find out until you give it a trial. You must not let father tell you I am sandless. Pop Farwell, the football coach, and Commander Doug Knapp, the athletic director, say I am

not sandless. I am clumsy, but I have plenty of sand is what they say about me. Perhaps I am just plain homesick to-night. I will try to be snappier next time. Good-night. Your loving son,

DERBY POWELL, U.S.N.A.

A night's sleep, a breakfast fairly peaceful, and the melancholy plebe felt more reconciled to his fate. In fact he began to regret having sent the lament to his mother. It made matters sound worse than they were and she had a habit of worrying about him as if he had not yet grown up. He had been caught off his guard, in a mood of black discouragement such as overtakes the best of us now and then.

A week passed. The upper classmen had ceased to harass Derby Powell. It was not because he had earned their critical approval. The physical director had intervened in the interests of football. Surmising that the rawboned plebe was having an uncomfortable time of it, the word went forth that he was to be let alone. He was getting fretty on the field and seemed to lack concentration. Further lessons in etiquette could be postponed until after the playing season. This edict brought so much relief to the distressed mind of Derby Powell that he repented of his impulse to resign from the Naval Academy.

It was with consternation, therefore, that he received the communication which his doting mother had written in response to his homesick confession. She was seriously upset, no doubt of it, as indicated by the following from her letter:

Our Congressman happened to be in town when your letter came. Your father looked him up at once and they had a long talk. The Congressman thinks a great deal of you, and he was terribly angry when he heard they had been *hazing* you at the Academy. It was like a red rag to a bull. He is on his way to Washington, and he says he will demand an investigation. This cowardly business of hazing must be stamped out, he says, if every last midshipman has to be fired from the Academy.

After thinking it over, Derby, I have decided to make the trip to Annapolis and see you myself. They won't let you come home to talk things over with us. Your father can't leave his business just now. I shall interview the superintendent and try to persuade him to let you resign. If you are as nervous and discouraged as you sound, it is no place for you, and the sooner you get out the better. We shall feel much happier if you can go back to Mount Bethel College next term. Even if they are making a to-do about you in football, it is not worth while to stay and be abused until you have a serious breakdown.

Derby Powell read this letter in his room and uttered strong words. He certainly had spilled

the beans. A telegram might head his anxious mother off. Alas, he discovered a fatal postscript. She was already on the way from Ohio and would reach Annapolis at ten o'clock of this very same night. He groaned. He could not obtain permission to see her at the hotel before the next afternoon. Meanwhile she would be planning to interview the superintendent and raising all the row she could. He would send her a note, but with the Congressman goading her on she might be hard to stop. Derby had inherited her obstinate streak, which was one of his assets on the football field.

Hastily tucking the letter in his blouse he carried it to the mess hall to be read with more care after dinner. It was consistent with the tragic destiny of a plebe that the letter should slip from his blouse and fall unperceived to the floor beside his chair. He failed to discover it when he passed out.

First Classman Anthony Wickham, dodging around an end of the table to avoid the rush, caught sight of the sheet of note-paper which had been removed from its envelope. He picked it up, glanced at the first words, '*My dearest Derby*,' and tried to overtake the rapidly moving plebe. The crowd was sweeping out of the hall,

however, a closely packed torrent of blue, and Derby Powell's sandy thatch was already impossible to discern.

Tony Wickham held the letter in his hand until he had turned into his own corridor. The glimpse of a word here and there, involuntarily, when he had rescued the letter from the floor, had greatly startled him. To a midshipman it was like touching a charged electric wire. The words had fairly jumped from the page at him — hazing — Congressman — investigate — superintendent.

The first classman gulped and felt weak in the knees. The thing was incredible. There had been no real hazing in the Academy during Rear Admiral Henry Culver's régime as superintendent. The midshipmen leaders were honestly endeavoring to break with tradition and wipe out hazing. They felt bound to do so in return for the unusual privileges which the admiral had seen fit to grant them. As they interpreted it, Derby Powell had not been hazed. He had not been harmed or really degraded. Not a finger had been laid on him. As Bancroft Hall read the code, 'Sitting on infinity' or being 'submarined' were too trivial to be called infractions of the code. Powell had invoked them by his surly re-

fusal to harmonize with the spirit of the regiment.

Right or wrong, this is how it appeared to Anthony Wickham who had been most active in the stunts devised to knock the rough corners off the plebe from Ohio. The idea of a congressional investigation seemed as preposterous as a nightmare. Midshipman Wickham held a debate with himself and decided that he was justified in reading the important parts of this sinister letter. It was vital to him and his friends at the mess table. If this outrageous peril really threatened, they deserved to be forewarned.

As gleaned from a swift perusal the information was more sensational than the fragmentary hints had conveyed. The mother of Derby Powell was on the war-path. She expected to lay the case in person before the superintendent.

'My gosh, she thinks this plebe of hers is nervous,' muttered Tony, with a shudder. 'She ought to see *me*. The doctors couldn't do a thing for it. And two recitations, drill and football this afternoon!'

Reaching his room, he had a few minutes of leisure. He put the damnatory letter in an envelope and addressed it to Derby Powell. Then he sat on his cot and stared at nothing until his

roommate, William Satterlee, came surging in to paw the papers on the table. Preoccupied as usual, he could not overlook the woe-begone posture of his dashing 'wife,' and the strange silence.

'Sick or something, Tony? You look rhino enough to bury. Has the Baltimore flapper stung you again?'

'I'm ruined, Bill. No girl could leave a man all shot to pieces like this. I told you we were running the rube, Powell — not enough to rub a freckle off his face; but he yells murder and the folks in Podunk have exploded. Congressman firing salvos. You know, bang, crash, bam! Hazing! Now make a funny joke out of *that* for your nutty old "Log."'

The editor-in-chief sat aghast, a cigarette sticking to his lower lip. He rumpled his curly hair, mechanically hurled a fistful of poetry into the waste-basket, and blurted:

'You're drunk or delirious. Both, by your looks. Is that the dope, honest? Come through.'

'I will give you the whole works to-night, Bill. Your game is to pass the word to pipe down and lay off the plebes, absolutely. Spoon on 'em. Don't let them have a Chinaman's chance to add any fuel to this bonfire. Get me?'

William Satterlee nodded, slapped his stricken

comrade on the back and tore out to keep a frantic editorial engagement before the bell rang. Tony Wickham plodded drearily through the afternoon routine until he had shifted into his football clothes. Then he seemed to find zest in living. Not that he loved football more, but that he loved Derby Powell less.

In the dressing-room he restored the lost letter to its owner. Powell colored and was greatly distressed. Nothing was said. It was a significant tableau. The coaches on the field and the midshipmen on the bleachers were astonished at the sudden change of form in the playing of Tony Wickham. He had been showing skill and speed enough before, but his heart had not been in it. This was the young man who now displayed a concentrated fury of attack. Death or glory, said 'Pop' Farwell, the head coach. If Tony drove Derby Powell into the turf much harder whenever they bumped, the big plebe would have to be dug out with a shovel.

Tony may have let his fists fly in the thick of a scrimmage, but he was careful not to make it an open slugging match. He had no intention of being chased off the field for losing his temper. He was determined, however, to make Derby Powell wish he had never seen a football.

An interested spectator was Lieutenant Commander David Magowan. Time had almost erased from his countenance the marks of battle with the Jack Crouch twin. His friends at the club had pelted him with rude jests concerning the kind of hooch which had caused him to tackle a freight train and throw it for a loss. He had kept his own counsel, as usual, and smiled with the air of a philosopher who found it a great life if you didn't weaken.

Until these tokens of violence were healed, he had deferred another private interview with his nephew. It had been awkward enough meeting Midshipman Wickham officially, in the department of seamanship, and to be conscious of his cynical and humorous stare. It was as much as to say that here was a fine old rip of an uncle to be handing out sermons on the side.

Magowan watched his nephew make an unholy wreck of rugged Derby Powell. Impatiently he dragged the coach aside to say:

'You can't tell me that boy won't fight, Pop. What the devil has got into him to-day? Give him another period to play and you will carry that plebe off feet first.'

'I have my eye on him, Captain Magowan. He is pulling some pretty rough stuff, but no-

thing dirty. You are dead right. If they go much longer I'll have to take Powell out and give him first aid. And there is a rugged guy you could hit with an axe and not make a dent. There is bad feeling between them, all of a sudden. I heard Wickham call him a yellow-bellied mucker.'

'Will you give Tony another chance if he keeps up this clip?'

'Wait and see. Probably no more than a flash in the pan. He has fooled me before, remember that.'

Midshipman Wickham himself felt no more certain than the coach. There was grim satisfaction in punishing Derby Powell, but this was a private feud. It could not remove the barrier that stood between him and the West Point game. In his own heart he was already sentenced and condemned.

When the evening came the thought of that letter from Derby Powell's mother made it impossible to settle down for the study period. The indefatigable Bill Satterlee called him an infernal nuisance. They grumbled at each other until the nine-thirty gunfire and release from rooms. Then came the brief interval of twenty-five minutes for visiting and recreation until tattoo. Satterlee raced down the corridor to 'The Log' office to

meet his staff for a hectic conference. Tony stayed in the room and was unfriendly to random callers. He was anticipating a stormy scene with Bill.

The editor came flying in at the last moment and was sullenly informed:

'I am going to French it, old man — by the window route — right after taps and inspection. I cut out the gumshoe trips into Crabtown in youngster year, but this has got to be done. Regulations be blowed. I can be back in an hour.'

William Satterlee bounded from the chair in which he was unlacing his shoes. He waved both arms and bawled at his errant wife:

'Aren't you in trouble enough, you besotted prune? You *are* dizzy. In danger of being busted on hazing charges and now you propose to risk it as a porch-climber. If a Jimmy Legs catches you, it's good-night. If I ever cross the hawse of that frescoed Baltimore vamp, I'll twist her little neck.'

'Listen, Bill, before you besmirch your uniform by hurling vile words at a lady,' patiently explained Tony. 'I want to discuss this thing in a perfectly sane manner. This Derby Powell's mother hits the beach at ten o'clock to-night, which is right now. She will go to Carvel Hall.

After a fretty night she will steam to the superintendent's office, and then, *wow!* My only chance is to cut in to-night and calm her down. You are savvy enough to get that. Hazing is a bogy word to her — instruments of torture — beat 'em to a jelly — maim the precious plebes for life. Passionate Congressmen roaring like lions.'

'So that is the dope?' was Bill's thoughtful comment. 'Yes, I can see the method in your madness. If Powell is really anxious to fade out into civil life, we can't stop him. But not on hazing charges. God forbid!'

'Precisely, Bill. I want his mother to see it right. I have nothing to conceal, no cards up my sleeve. She has simply got herself into a state of mind. If I can convince her that nobody has had any designs on Derby's life or nervous system, she may call it a false alarm. And that would block the Congressman off from throwing gas bombs.'

'Maybe so,' admitted the intelligent William Satterlee, 'but you are dead wrong in jumping ship to-night. It's a rotten play for a first classman and a football player. Of course I won't report you. It's not done. But you don't know the up-to-date routes out of the yard and as likely as not you will blunder into a gyrene.'

'No marine sentry will nail *me*. Nothing to it,' confidently asserted Tony.

'What about changing your clothes? You can't parade through Crabtown in uniform after ten o'clock at night.'

'Johnny Sinkler keeps a suit of cits with a cigar-store man outside the wall. I can change there. And Johnny knows the safe courses to steer. Has 'em all mapped out.'

'The sneaky rat,' scolded Bill. 'He is on the edge of dismissal right now.'

'Maybe so. I don't like him. But, anyhow, the best route from this wing is across the parade ground to the gun sheds and the willow trees, and you take Farragut Field at the double and ooze out of the yard behind the grand stands.'

'That doesn't make it any less putrid, Tony. You are floundering from one mess into another. If you get pinched, you needn't come back to the old home and sob on your wife's bosom. There is a limit to what I am obliged to put up with.'

CHAPTER VII

TONY WICKHAM'S CROWDED EVENING

HAVING descended from a lower window of Bancroft Hall and flitted from the yard by one of the 'porch-climber's' devious routes, First Classman Anthony Wickham left his uniform in the back room of the cigar-store and reappeared in a gray suit and a brown hat, both too small for him. Uneasily he prowled through the Annapolis streets and slackened his pace as he approached the hotel. To walk in to the desk was running a frightful chance of encountering some officer from the Academy. Strategy was absolutely essential.

He hovered near the entrance of Carvel Hall, in a shadowy spot. It was difficult to make the plunge. A colored bell-boy came out with a bag. Tony drew him aside:

'Here, George, I want to see you a minute.'

'Yessuh.'

'You take this card up to Mrs. Powell's room. I think she registered a little while ago. Is anybody in the little parlor near the side door?'

'No, suh. I jes' now come by.'

Tony scribbled a few words on his card and cautiously stole into the parlor. His misfit clothes added to his sense of embarrassment. He was not the debonair first classman who usually carried things off with such easy grace. While he waited a sudden thought smote him with panic. Bonehead! How could he have overlooked it? If he should fail to hit it off with Derby Powell's mother, she would probably report this visit to the admiral — how First Classman Wickham in funny clothes had insisted on seeing her late at night to try to talk her out of the purpose of her journey.

'Unless I can charm her with my language it looks like more raspberries,' sighed the suffering midshipman. 'The gent who advised the human race to look before it leaped said something. The Academy teaches you how to think and act, I don't think!'

A few minutes more of dwelling with this sickening possibility and he might have fled. The mother of Derby Powell came downstairs at once. Anthony Wickham scrambled to his feet and jerked at the sleeve of the coat which failed to cover his wrists. There confronted him an insignificant woman of thin features and a severe expression, whose hair was turning gray. She

looked tired and a little frightened, having ventured alone into strange waters. Not so easy to charm, reflected Tony. She did not offer her hand. There was no smile of greeting. Curtly she said, as she glanced at the card:

'You wish to see me about my son, Mr. Wickham? I am interested, naturally. Will you sit down? What is it you wish to tell me?'

'Er — ahem — that you have gained a wrong impression of the Academy, Mrs. Powell,' the visitor began as he seated himself. The hateful trousers climbed halfway to his knees. He gazed at them sadly. He was not himself.

'I prefer to form my own opinions,' acidly replied the mother of Derby Powell. 'My information is perfectly reliable. My son has been the victim of the most outrageous —'

'That is just the point,' Tony eagerly interrupted. 'Mothers and fathers get this place all wrong in plebe year. I used to feel terribly rhino myself when I was a fourth classman, and my dad came surging down here one time, just like this. I give you my word, Mrs. Powell, he went home next day and never made another peep the whole year. Plebes are queer ginks. You never can tell when they will back-fire in the muffler. But it is harmless noise, honestly it is. Now, if you will let me explain —'

'You act to me like one of the ringleaders, Mr. Wickham. Did the other young ruffians send you to intercede for them? You look real guilty, if being awkward and uncomfortable is any sign. I will say this much to you — that I read the awful stories about hazing before my son ever took it into his head to come to Annapolis. It was the one thing that made me object, but he was so big and strong that I thought he could take care of himself anywhere. We are people of very moderate means and my husband agreed with me that if Derby could get a good education for nothing, at the expense of the Government, and then be a Navy officer which pays very well from our standpoint, though some think different, it would be the wise and thrifty thing to do. But I can't help feeling there is a prejudice against a boy like Derby just because he comes from a plain home and folks that have to work hard for what they get. You are doing yourself no good whatever, Mr. Wickham, by coming here this time of night and trying to pull strings. I shouldn't wonder if you had played hooky. You look so.'

'Why say that, Mrs. Powell?' meekly replied her victim. 'Now what I want to explain is about this hazing, as you call it. A most unfortunate word. You have no idea how serious it is to a

midshipman accused of such a thing. It may ruin his career. Really, Mrs. Powell, it will amuse you to hear exactly what it was that your son complained about. Ha, ha, it will make you laugh your head off, I'm sure. He never meant to give you a wrong impression. Oh, no, indeed. Derby Powell isn't that kind. A manly fellow, every inch of him. You couldn't make him beef about anything. He would never dream of queering other midshipmen. Why, I play football against him every day. As for letting it get to the superintendent's ears, Derby Powell would be terribly indignant —'

'I found a note from my son when I arrived at the hotel,' said Mrs. Powell with increased asperity. 'He has changed his tune. But I know better. He has been coerced, threatened into keeping his mouth shut. That is what you miserable hazers do. You probably vowed you would brand him with red-hot irons or throw him in the river tied in a sack unless he took back all he said.'

'Oh, well, what's the use?' murmured the first classman. 'Derby will convince you as soon as you talk it over with him. The mischief of it is that you insist on seeing Admiral Culver first. And that *will* knock things galley-west.'

'You had better trot along to your barracks before you land yourself in more trouble, Mr. Wickham. I am as sorry as I can be for your mother. You look like a boy that used to have good instincts.'

Mrs. Powell made an abrupt exit from the parlor. The young man in the loathsome gray suit shook his head, rammed his hands in his pockets, and drifted into the outer darkness. He would hotfoot it back to the cigar-store, jump into his uniform, and sneak for Bancroft Hall to endure the bitter gibes of Bill Satterlee.

He had moved no more than a street away from Carvel Hall when he noted the leisurely approach of a gentleman in a black topcoat. It hung unbuttoned and disclosed the fact that he was wearing evening dress. A civilian, most likely! Ready to skulk at the sight of a naval uniform, the hunted midshipman was not seriously alarmed, although he took the precaution to tack across the street and so avoid passing the stranger too close aboard. This was a hostile area and a sharp lookout was advisable.

Tony Wickham's course carried him too near a street light at the corner. He glanced over his shoulder at the gentleman in the topcoat, who had halted beside a tree, where his presence was

betrayed by the red spark of a cigar. Tony quickened his gait. The gentleman with the cigar called out in a resonant voice:

'Halt!'

The midshipman shivered and broke into a run. He was checked by the command:

'Come here, you Tony. Strike your colors. You can't fool your Uncle Dave.'

The fugitive surrendered. No use in running for it. He was caught. So slowly that it looked as if his feet adhered to the pavement, the nephew of David Magowan retraced his steps. His uncle produced a small flashlamp from a pocket of the topcoat and let it play up and down the tall, dejected midshipman, like a cruiser examining a prize overhauled at night.

'Camouflaged like a hick and running with no lights,' sorrowfully observed the lieutenant commander. 'Anthony Wickham, you will have to talk mighty pretty to get yourself out of this. What's the game?'

The first classman hesitated. He was trapped. He could not confess to the errand which had taken him to Carvel Hall. Torments would not have dragged from him the admission, to an officer of the Academy, that he was entangled in a hazing scrape. It was taboo. He proposed to

give no more testimony against himself than could be helped. The blunder of appealing to Derby Powell's mother would not be repeated. Again David Magowan sternly demanded:

'What's the game? That girl again? Didn't she stay put in Baltimore after I got her out of hock at the hotel for you?'

The midshipman looked his uncle straight in the eye as he said:

'It was not the girl, sir. I sent her the emerald pin, as I promised, but it is a dead loss. I guess she has no more use for me. She took it for granted that she would be off the list for the Academy hops after she queered herself at the admiral's dinner. I haven't seen her since, sir.'

'Humph! That sounds straight enough. As I told you once before, Tony, I refuse to believe you would lie to me. I refuse to believe that of any first classman. Then it must be another girl. What else can it be? You are a fast worker. What route did you use out of Bancroft Hall tonight?'

'Route Number Two, sir,' candidly answered Tony. 'Route Number One, across the tennis courts, past Sampson Hall, and out by Worden Field, is reported to be unsafe. The marines on

the sea wall at Dewey Basin are liable to spot you.'

'Thanks. It is another girl, then?'

'No, sir.'

'See here, son, you and I are due for a showdown,' heavily exclaimed Magowan. 'I am not in uniform and it would make no difference if I were. I am not snooping around to catch midshipmen out of bounds. I'm no dashed Jimmy Legs. You refuse to tell me why you are breaking regulations?'

'Yes, sir.'

'If I change my mind and decide to call you a liar, have you got the guts to resent it?'

'I have, sir.'

'Well, we won't disgrace ourselves in a street brawl. Listen carefully, Tony. I shall take it upon myself to punish you personally for this — and I shall pick the time and place. The dirty trick of beating it out of the yard after taps you can settle with your own conscience and your own ideas of honor. But I will not permit you to go on disgracing *me* at the Academy. Dave Magowan is your uncle and the only thing in the world he cares two straws about is *the Service*. And as long as you and I stay in the same yard and wear the same uniform, you must go straight.

Do you imagine that I would stand for this kind of thing if we were in the same ship?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Well, you'd find out so quick that it would make your head buzz. Now I am going to tell you something else. I was in Kensington recently, over Sunday.'

'So my mother wrote, sir, but she didn't say much about it.'

'She wouldn't,' said Magowan, with a flicker of humor. 'I found out what the trouble is with you — several things. I understand why you want to quit the Service. Your dad has poisoned you with his rotten gospel of money and swank and hot air. It has made you lose sight of the real values of life. But you have not skidded so far that you can't get back into the road. There is something more seriously wrong with you than that, Tony.'

'I suppose I have to stand and take it,' muttered the midshipman, 'but you ought to leave dad out of it. He means well enough.'

'Hell is chock-a-block with folks that meant well. They feed the fires with 'em. There is no room in this man's Navy for a man that means well. Do you know what you are, Tony Wickham? You are a coward. Afraid of football,

afraid of the West Point game. You have been that way ever since they put you on the A Squad in youngster year. You thought it was your own miserable secret. A fine charge to prove against a midshipman of the United States Naval Academy.'

'I'll whip you for that, so help me,' snarled Tony Wickham, 'and the sooner you pick the time and place the better. I wouldn't let an admiral get away with that if it meant being shot for it.'

'You wouldn't be so brave, young man, if Bernie Crouch stood up to you and talked like this,' was the vicious retort.

The midshipman's anger died. He stood rigid and dumb, like one overwhelmed. The uncle who loved him, who had deliberately lashed him with these taunts, was moved to secret pity. For a time they stood in this profoundly eloquent silence, in the semi-darkness of the street where they could not clearly see each other's faces. It was Anthony Wickham who spoke first.

'*Bernie Crouch!*'

He said it with a long sigh that was wrenched from the depths of his soul.

'Yes, Bernie Crouch,' echoed his uncle. He was sorely tempted to yield to sympathy, but this would have been to lose ground.

'Yes, Bernie Crouch, Tony, or his shadow. Fighting a shadow all this time and letting it down you.'

'Don't, please don't, Uncle Dave,' implored the nephew. 'I wasn't really sure that I was — I was afraid. I tried to fool myself. But that must be — that is why I never finished the football season on the first team. It used to catch hold of me and choke me at night, and I'd wake up crying. Bad dreams! Terrible dreams! It began in high school, before I went away from home at all, after Bernie Crouch had beaten me almost to death that last time. And it didn't go away. I could not seem to make it go away. Do you understand? Can anybody understand it?'

'Not I,' stoutly lied David Magowan. 'This idea of staying whipped makes me sick at the stomach. And so you believe that if you met Bernie Crouch again he could whip you?'

Tony Wickham had nothing to say.

'I am right, then,' resumed David. 'Surrendering to a shadow! Why, I fought the other twin, Jack Crouch, in Kensington on Sunday afternoon, and sank him in three rounds. It was no fancy sparring match, mind you. We went at each other for blood. It was not a lucky punch that put him out, or anything like that. I

smeared him until he had to be carried off the floor.'

'Y-you whipped Jack C-crouch?' stuttered Tony, finding his voice. 'Why, he is every bit as good as Bernie, and always was.'

'That is what he told me. Yes, and I am what you boys call an old man, slowing up, soft in the wind — no football for years — an easy mark for any husky lad.'

'*You* whipped a Crouch twin?' repeated Anthony Wickham.

'Yes, and I intend to whip you when the time comes,' growled the lieutenant commander.

Ignoring this ferocious declaration, the midshipman exclaimed:

'Then *you* could put it over Bernie Crouch.'

'You wouldn't find *me* afraid to try. An old man in your eyes, Tony, pretty well worn out in the war, cooped up in a destroyer for the last two years, nothing but a school-teacher now.'

'Yes, sir,' absently replied the nephew. 'Do you mind if I say good-night to you?'

'Go right along. I hope you make port without getting caught. And be sure to ask your roommate to tuck you in. If Bernie Crouch sits on your chest during the night, try not to yell and wake up the corridor.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADMIRAL MAKES HIM LISTEN

THE admiral's flag lieutenant was at his desk in the reception-room of the headquarters building when the mother of Derby Powell climbed the staircase and timidly opened the door. Heaven knows what she expected to encounter, but it must have been something intensely hostile and disagreeable. This was expressed in every line of her thin, weary face.

It was a quiet and pleasant room — with long windows overlooking the trim walks and wide green spaces of the yard and the soaring dome of the chapel. Rugs on the polished floor, a leather-cushioned divan, a chair or two, and a flat desk almost bare of papers behind which sat an affable young man with a lieutenant's stripes, gold cords looped over his shoulders, and not a care in the world, as far as the eye could see.

An officer of higher rank came in from an adjoining room and paused to chat.

'Will you wait a minute, old man?' said the flag lieutenant. He stepped forward to bow to Mrs. Powell whose disfavor was so very apparent.

'Good-morning, madam, what may I do for you?'

'I wish to see Admiral Culver personally,' she replied, her voice shaking with excitement. 'Personally! Is he in?'

'I'm sorry, but he has not come over from the house. We expect him any moment. Please sit down, will you?'

'He won't pass me along to some understrapper, will he?' she demanded. 'I have heard so much about red tape and sending people from pillar to post in anything that had to do with the Government.'

'The superintendent will be glad to give you all the time you wish,' smiled the flag lieutenant, 'if you have a son in the Academy. Do I guess right?'

'Yes, you do. My name is Mrs. Windsor F. Powell, from Cressfield, Ohio, and my son Derby is in the fourth class.'

'We certainly know who *he* is, Mrs. Powell. You must let me escort you to the football practice this afternoon.'

'I prefer to wait and see about that, thank you.'

She retired to a chair in a corner and vigilantly watched every door. The admiral would

have to be agile to elude her. She began to feel perplexed. These younger officers seemed to have nothing much else to do than to show courtesy to visitors. This was not in the least like venturing into a den of lions. Here was where the business of administering this immense institution was centered, the seat of final authority, but there was no running about or bawling orders. Why, there was more going on in Mr. Windsor F. Powell's retail grocery store in Cressfield. It was her first glimpse of the smoothly efficient methods of naval administration. She felt relaxed in mind and body. This tranquil, untroubled room was actually soothing.

A door opened. Rear Admiral Henry Culver came in like a breeze from the salt ocean. He had a word for the marine orderly, a hearty greeting for the dapper flag lieutenant. Past sixty years of age, his voice had the vigorous note of youth. Waiving an introduction, he doffed his cap and crossed the room to say to the lone woman:

'You are a midshipman's mother, are you not, Mrs. — thank you, Mrs. Powell? And you wish to have a talk with me? Come right inside. Other business can wait.'

He conducted her into his own spacious office. So kindly was his ruddy visage, so genuinely

solicitous, that her militant indignation began to crumble. He was a man with whom she could talk things over, as simple as the folks back home in spite of his glittering sleeves and masterful air of command. Her eyes filled with tears. It was a reaction from the painful tension of her solitary journey. The admiral moved a chair close to hers and exclaimed, while she was fumbling for something to say:

'You have not told me a word, Mrs. Powell, but I am willing to bet that your son is in the fourth class and has been writing unhappy, discouraged letters. He is so downhearted that he wants to resign. And you haven't slept a wink since you packed up and came on to beg me to let him leave the Academy.'

'I do declare, I never had my mind read like that!' gasped Mrs. Powell, who discovered that she had not forgotten how to smile. 'Yes, Admiral Culver, Derby was never nervous before. I am sure his mental condition must be serious.'

'What makes him nervous, Mrs. Powell?'

'*Hazing!*' she fairly exploded. 'With twenty-four hundred harum-scarum boys to look after, I don't wonder you miss some of the things that go on in this place, but it's your business to find out.'

'Hazing?' ejaculated the superintendent. 'The commandant of midshipmen is the executive officer in charge of Bancroft Hall. He has made no report of hazing to me. What have they been doing to Derby Powell?'

'He did not tell me, but it made him nervous,' she insisted. 'And you can imagine how I felt when it drove me to the expense of this long trip from home.'

The admiral pressed a button. The flag lieutenant appeared. 'Halsey, send for Fourth Classman Powell. Wait a minute.' He turned to the mother and asked:

'Has the boy told you who has been hazing him?'

'No, but I can swear to one of them. He came to see me last night and made a very poor impression. Wickham is his name.'

'At what time last night, Mrs. Powell?'

'About half-past ten. I was all tired out and ready for bed, but he sent up his card and wrote on it that it was confidential and important.'

'It was, to him,' said the admiral with austerity. 'Halsey, telephone the commandant of midshipmen to find Wickham and send him along at once. If you will pardon me, Mrs. Powell, while I sign these letters —'

Derby Powell was first to arrive from a section room. He was breathless and flustered and red to the roots of his hair. To be summoned to meet the admiral face to face made him quake in his shoes. He cast a woeful, bitter glance at his mother and stood like a frozen image.

'Have they been hazing you?' inquired the august personage. He spoke in a fatherly way. So dismayed was the awkward plebe that severity would have locked his lips. Again he cast a look of reproach at his martyred mother and faltered:

'I wanted to forget it, but there was no heading *her* off. That's the way it is with mothers. The best of 'em get nervous.'

'Nervous, Derby?' cried his mother. 'It's *your* nerves that I am so anxious about. And you don't act one bit grateful.'

The admiral averted a family quarrel by suggesting:

'Suppose we learn just how you were hazed, Powell.'

'I don't know as I should call it real hazing, sir. Probably I deserved it. I was a pretty bad actor, come to think it over. Well, they made me submerge one day.'

'Put you under the table? I don't permit that

sort of thing. It may improve a fourth classman's manners, but it interferes with his rations. Nothing should get between a growing boy and three square meals per diem. What next?'

'I had to sit on nothing while I ate my bread pudding, sir.'

'And then what?'

'Oh, I got cussed up and down the corridors when I didn't brace and was sort of sloppy, sir. It was mostly the midshipman officers that bawled me out.'

'Did anybody lay a hand on you?'

'No, sir. I *told* mother to lay off this fuss, didn't I? I sent her a note at the hotel asking her, for Heaven's sake, to pipe down. But, no, by gosh, you can't budge her if she once gets set. And now look at me.'

'You would look better if you held your chin up and pulled your stomach in,' advised the admiral. 'As I understand it, young man, you are bringing no charges against the midshipmen at your table. But for your mother's sake I wish you to feel perfectly satisfied that you are getting a square deal from me. Let me read you section four of the Act of Congress in relation to hazing and other violations of the regulations of the Naval Academy.'

That the offense of 'hazing' as mentioned in the Act shall consist of any unauthorized assumption of authority by one midshipman over another midshipman whereby the last-mentioned midshipman shall or may suffer, or be exposed to suffer, any cruelty, indignity, hardship, or oppression, or the deprivation or abridgment of any right, privilege, or advantage to which he shall be legally entitled.

This was a formidable broadside. It made Derby Powell's freckles fairly blanch. He was horrified at the thought of involving any of his fellow midshipmen in a court-martial upon such accusations as these. He blinked when the admiral asked:

'Did you suffer any cruelty, Powell?'

'No, sir.'

'Any indignity?'

'I'll say that I have felt a lot more dignified than when I was scrooched under the table trying to keep another fellow's feet out of my plate. Now, mother, will you *please* keep quiet?'

'How much humiliation, hardship, or oppression did you suffer?' pursued the admiral.

'Well, sir, it is mighty humiliating for me to be dragged into this against my will and maybe get other midshipmen in trouble.'

Mrs. Powell's anger had veered against her

ungrateful son. She restrained a strong impulse to shake him until his brass buttons flew off.

'You big gump!' she cried. 'Ready to bite the hand that fed and cradled and spanked you all those weary years! Why, I begin to realize that it would do you more good than anything in the world to be hazed and oppressed in reasonable doses.'

'You heard what I said, mother,' doggedly answered her rugged son. 'A plebe is liable to get this way every so often. He packs a grouch and wishes he were dead or something. What if he does write home about it? Parents — that is, sensible ones — don't go up in the air this way.'

'Steady, Powell; enough of that,' was the admiral's rebuke. 'You are guilty of conduct unbecoming a gentleman if you fail to understand what a mother's love means. You are not the only foolish, half-baked boy whose mother has made sacrifices to come to the Academy to find out for herself how he was getting on.'

'I didn't mean to hurt her feelings, sir. I guess I owe her an apology. Perhaps I had better have a private session with her. This seems to be a family affair.'

'It is rapidly drifting that way,' agreed the superintendent of the Naval Academy. 'Now,

Mrs. Powell, if you will be good enough to come back here this afternoon, I shall be able to give you a final report.'

'It sounds as if I blew up with a loud report when I wrote that letter home,' muttered Fourth Classman Derby Powell.

'And to think I got our Congressman so excited that he called it a burning issue!' exclaimed Mrs. Windsor Powell. 'I should say it was my duty to send him a telegram and tell him the fire is all out.'

She took her son by the arm and towed him firmly from the room. It was time to assert her rights as the superior officer, even in the presence of a rear admiral. The latter gentleman strolled into the reception-room and reflectively quoted Scripture to the flag lieutenant.

'Halsey, a wise man maketh a glad father; but a foolish man despiseth his mother.'

'Yes, sir, in plebe year they are foolish, all right. Ah, here comes your handsome first classman, all set to hear the death sentence.'

Anthony Wickham had opened the door as softly as if he were afraid of making a noise and startling himself. He was always well-tailored and immaculate. Carrying himself with just a touch of a jaunty, devil-may-care air, which

could not be called a swagger, he looked the part of the gallantly boyish naval officer. Taut and respectful he stood, a figure very unlike the awkward Derby Powell. Head up, he awaited orders.

That he was in serious trouble he took for granted. More than once during this last careless year or so he had skated on thin ice, but there had been no disaster. Now he might be in the shadow of a court-martial, as his futile interview with Derby Powell's mother had led him to infer. Well, if he should be kicked out of the Academy, perhaps that was the easiest and surest way of getting rid of the uniform and returning to civil life. If the Navy should require his services after graduation, he might not be permitted to resign.

And yet as he stood there, dreading cross-examination, his pride and self-respect rebelled against making such a cheap and sorry exit. He realized that the very possibility of it hurt him like a wound. He felt surprised that the emotions of loyalty and devotion should stir him so profoundly. Was it true that a midshipman's luckiest day was when he said good-bye to the Academy? He felt not so sure of this. His indifference had been shaken overnight, ever so much more so by this situation than by all the

threats and arguments of his two-fisted uncle, David Magowan.

Admiral Culver seemed in no haste to investigate the conduct of this silent, apprehensive first classman. He glanced at the papers in a wire basket on the desk, walked to a window, and stood there with his hands behind him. Turning, he leaned against the ledge and began to talk in leisurely, discursive fashion, like a man of ripened years and many experiences who happened to be in a reminiscent mood.

Vivid little episodes of his own youth at the Academy, a small place then with rougher customs and cruder manners, of practice cruises in the last of the stately old sailing frigates and sloops-of-war, of brine-pickled, stormy old petty officers surviving then to link those days with the Navy of topsail yards, of cutlass and pike and boarders away, of broadsides of round shot thudding into oaken timbers.

Long cruises and slow promotion for a young officer, in ships that were obsolete and neglected. Then the awakening of a new spirit with the building of the first steel cruisers, and a revolution in the tactics and the training of the Service. The Spanish War, and the squadrons of Dewey and Sampson which had victoriously met the or-

deal by fire in Manila Bay and off the headlands of Santiago.

Swift expansion and bigger ships and heavier armament, better gunnery, the technician thrusting the seaman into the background. The war against Germany, problems bewilderingly new and untried, to combat the ambushed submarine, war waged beneath the surface of the sea, and to keep the flowing road open to France for the passage of two million troops and their supplies.

Captain Henry Culver then, commanding a superdreadnaught battleship, transferred to command all the American naval forces on the coast of France, with a vice-admiral's rank; the problems of establishing bases, building up a vast organization, convoying the troop ships into port and getting them out again.

Wickham listened with fascinated attention. Lectures and textbooks had hammered at him such facts as these, but they had seemed dead stuff to the mind of youth, so impatient, so easily bored. This was romance and adventure, with the breath of life in it. His imagination filled in the outline.

Big things mentioned, in words so matter-of-fact, as all in the day's work. The satisfaction of doing the job well, whatever it might be, for its

own sake. This was unconsciously woven all through the story. Money was not the motive nor glory the reward.

This occurred to Anthony Wickham as a novel point of view. David Magowan's distinguished record of service had left him cold. He knew it only by hearsay. To hear the same gospel expounded by Rear Admiral Henry Culver, late commander-in-chief of the Atlantic fleet, was a different matter. It occurred to the midshipman, as a novel and arresting idea, that this elderly servant of his flag and his country might be a much more admirable type of man than his successful, hustling father who bawled patriotism and thought in terms of dollars.

Worth thinking about, at any rate! It sort of took hold. The comparison could not be avoided. And a first-class salesman on the road for the Morris Wickham Company would quit in disgust if he couldn't make more money than a rear admiral of the United States Navy. Was it not rather stupid, after all, if you rated a man by the money he was smart enough to take away from other people? His father had another guess coming, concluded Anthony Wickham, who was really thinking for himself. Just then Admiral Culver remarked, with uncanny insight:

'It is no discredit to a young man when he feels unreconciled to the Service as a career. But I want to know that he is determined *to make good* in civil life, to be worthy of the Naval Academy and its traditions wherever he goes. On the other hand, if a midshipman is qualified for leadership in the Service, if he can afford to disregard the small income and the other disadvantages, then I think he ought to stand by. What about you, Mr. Wickham?'

'I have been wanting to get out, sir. It is a different proposition with my uncle, David Magowan. He has no interest in anything else and I can't see where he would fit in if he did get out. He is a hard-boiled Navy man.'

'A ten-minute egg? That sounds odd to me because no more than three months ago your uncle was offered fifteen thousand dollars a year to take charge of the operating department of one of the largest shipping companies in the Atlantic trade.'

'Great Scott, you don't say so,' cried Tony. 'If I told my father that, he would call me a liar. And Uncle Dave turned it down?'

'Yes; he is one of the old-fashioned shellbacks, like myself. There is more to a job than the pay check.'

The admiral's manner changed. He was curt and cold as he rapped out: 'What about this deviling Derby Powell at mess and your unauthorized absence from academic limits last night?'

'Guilty on both counts, sir,' was the candid response.

'Any extenuating circumstances?'

'It didn't seem like hazing, sir. As for busting out to see his mother, I was a walking delegate, you might call it, for all the fellows involved.'

'You don't have to inform on them. The commandant can get their names easily enough. What I have tried to impress on you first classmen is the difficulty of drawing the line between assisting in the education of a fourth classman and hazing him. The law is strict and it has teeth in it, as you know. Derby Powell is very manly about it and takes the blame upon himself. There will be no proceedings in the case. You will report yourself to the commandant for such punishment as he may see fit to impose.'

'There will be no court-martial, sir?'

'No. I should be very sorry to see you find yourself in any more trouble this year, Mr. Wickham. I have had high hopes of you — and there is yet time. Do you understand?'

'I think so, sir. Thank you very much.'

The midshipman faced about and marched away. Once more the admiral confided in the flag lieutenant.

'Halsey, the boy actually listened to me. I fancied I was getting under his skin. He will be plastered with demerits, have his liberty stopped and so on, for hopping over the wall last night and the additional crime of making Derby Powell nervous. But all that will make him no fonder of the Academy and the Service. Confound it, I am an old fool, but I do wish I might fetch that lad up with a round turn.'

'Perhaps you did, admiral. I heard you yarning to him. It was not so much what you said as the way you said it. I noticed him when he went out. I should say he had a flea in his ear. He was an imitation of a midshipman in deep thought. You wiped that don't-give-a-damn expression off his face, I'll say that much.'

This was quite accurate. Strange it is that a youth will go blundering along, head down, eyes shut, like a bull at a gate, oblivious of warnings, entreaties, persuasions. Then some one voice, casually, suddenly, will make him stop, look, and listen. Waking up, finding one's self, whatever you may call it — the thing is known to occur.

Still absent-minded, Anthony Wickham reported at the commandant's office in Bancroft Hall, confessed his sins, and almost indifferently heard the consequences. This, after all, was a matter of minor concern. He had been given a chance to finish the four years with his class, to mend a somewhat damaged record. He desired to mend it. This was important. He looked forward to discussing certain things with his father during Christmas leave. Here was an issue sharply drawn, two ways of looking at life, that of Rear Admiral Henry Culver, U.S.N., and that of Morris Wickham, Esquire. Which was right? Which was the truer measure of success?

During study period in the evening Bill Satterlee looked up from a book to say:

'For a low-browed criminal that has put in a trying day you seem to be in an excellent state of repair. No profanity, no urge for drink, no desire to beat your wife. How come?'

'Bill, in some respects you are a wise guy. At times you use the old bean for something else than to hang your cap on. That kind of drill is new stuff for me. Leave me be. Go on and finish the fight with the forty pages of ordnance for tomorrow. I am trying to figure out why I came to the Academy.'

'I never did understand that, Tony. Tell me when you have it doped out.'

The brief recreation period before bedtime shattered the silence of the long corridors. A quartet began to rehearse its numbers for the next midshipmen's show, harmonious strains long drawn out. Anthony Wickham raised a window to listen. It was a new song, different from the usual programme of sentimental or comic trash. Some one with a gift for melody had written the music for the words. A coincidence, it seemed to First Classman Wickham. He was impressionable, responsive to influences. To-night this song so matched his altered mood that it seemed an echo from his own heart:

The Mother sits by Severn side
  Where Severn joins the Bay,
And great gray ships go down the tide
  And carry her sons away.
They carry them far, they carry them wide,
  To all of the Seven Seas,
But never beyond her love and pride,
And ever the deathless tales abide
  They learned at the Mother's knee.

They come from South, they come from North,
  They come from East and West;
And who can say when all go forth,
  That any of these is best?

With names unknown and names that won
  Their fame in a hundred fights,
The admiral's son and the plowman's son,
Mothered by her they all are one,
  Her race of sailor knights.

CHAPTER IX

AN OLD-TIMER BUCKS THE LINE

Lieutenant Commander David Magowan was unaware that his nephew had been persuaded to stop, look, and listen. When last seen, skulking late at night through the Annapolis streets, the young man had refused to say what he was doing out of bounds. The whole episode was so thoroughly disreputable that the more Magowan pondered it the more deeply it rankled. His own rigid sense of duty was a troublesome factor. In the case of his sister's son he ought to be more strictly impartial than if the offender were some other midshipman.

It was out of the question to let Tony get away with it and perhaps repeat the trick of playing truant from the yard to meet whatever girl might engage his roving fancy. Instead of reporting him, however, Magowan's resolve to deal out the punishment after his own fashion was unshaken. The minor penalties of the elaborate code of regulations would never bite deep enough. Tony was toughened to these by now. They were no more than irritants. He would try to be clever

enough not to get caught next time. Kill or cure was the verdict which Magowan was unwilling to revise.

He hoped he might find solace in the football practice. Tony had been compelled to confess that he was afraid of the haunting shadow of the West Point tackle, Bernie Crouch. A coward? His uncle had brutally assailed him with this most hateful of all words. But was it cowardice? In reality a misfortune, Magowan said to himself, something pitiful and tragic and obscure. It would never do, however, to condone or sympathize with it. Perhaps Tony might gain the upper hand unaided now that the specter had been dragged into the open and was a thing to be faced and fought. It was no longer his vaguely portentous secret.

'By Jove, perhaps he had begun to get a grip on himself even before I pitched into him,' hopefully reflected David Magowan while walking in the direction of Farragut Field. 'Yesterday he tore into that husky brute of a Derby Powell in quite a different spirit from anything I have seen him show. The Navy punch! No mistake! Yes, it was like the genuine stuff.'

The solicitous and slightly remorseful uncle was doomed to disappointment. A flash in the

pan! He soon perceived that Tony had ceased attempting to wreck Derby Powell's football ambitions. It was no longer like a feud. Tony seemed content to play his slashing, quick-witted game in the rush line, but it was shorn of that irresistible momentum which had distinguished it for a single day, that do-or-die quality that refuses to admit defeat.

Ignorant of events behind the scenes, poor Magowan had no way of comprehending that his nephew felt no more hatred of Derby Powell, the penitent plebe, who had protested to the admiral that he had not been hazed and was sorry he had whimpered about it. Magowan stood apart from his friends on the side lines. It bothered him to have to talk to them. He chewed his lip and scowled at the hard-driven elevens as they surged up and down the field. He had deluded himself. The boy could not rid himself of his football curse. Could anything in the world bring back his lost confidence and repair his broken determination?

There was one last card to play, a desperate remedy. It had first suggested itself when the lieutenant commander had felt the impulse to put on the gloves with the Jack Crouch twin in the barn at Kensington. And now the uncle framed it in words as he soliloquized:

'I can see no other way out of this jam. The boy must have a sense of shame, for all his indifference. If I whip him, it may result in a come-back. His phantom dread of Bernie Crouch holds over from when he was a high-school kid. But I am willing to bet that if he has to take a walloping from an old has-been like me, he will never rest until he has lived it down and shown that he is fit to wear the uniform and to play with any Navy football squad. If he trounces me, well, that will be unpleasant for yours truly, but it will most beautifully solve the problem of Midshipman Anthony Wickham. Either way I get the short end of it, being in for more rough treatment which will mar my manly beauty and invite the cruel jeers of my fellow officers. The path of duty never was smooth going and when treaties fail you have to resort to arms.'

This dignified philosopher had no intention of engaging in a duel of fisticuffs with a midshipman. There would not be a repetition of the episode with the Jack Crouch twin. Magowan's methods were not so crude as all that. From Farragut Field he trudged over to the gymnasium where he spent an hour in setting-up exercises, swimming in the pool, and boxing with the instructor. Sound in wind and limb, he con-

vinced himself, rather frisky for a patriarch of thirty-five.

Before dinner he was playing billiards in the club when Halsey, the flag lieutenant, paused to look on. He remarked, as soon as Magowan had run out his string:

'Has Tony Wickham told you anything?'

'About what?'

'The admiral sent for him this morning, Dave. Derby Powell had made a noise to his folks — thought he had been hazed or something. His poor mother came on from Ohio to rescue her child. Wickham made a frightfully foolish play — legged it to Carvel Hall after taps to file a plea for mercy. Of course she reported it to the old man.'

'Here, Halsey,' exclaimed Magowan. 'When did this happen?'

'Last night. Derby Powell behaved very handsomely; seemed anxious to call it a mistake as far as he was concerned.'

'And how did Tony Wickham take it?'

'He came through with bells on. You would have been proud of him. Never batted an eye. Told the old man he was guilty of busting the regulations and ready to take his medicine. He never side-stepped for a second.'

'Good! Bully for him!' cried Magowan, his

face radiant. 'I knew he was holding something out on me, but —'

'Listen, Dave. You have worried about the kid, I know that. Far be it from me to butt in, but perhaps you have scolded him too much. The admiral took a different slant this morning. You ought to have heard him loosen up to your nephew. It was like one of those hairy old bos'n's mates spilling yarns to a bunch of pop-eyed youngsters on a practice cruise. The old man actually reeled off the story of his life. He had an objective, of course. He never fires at random. Young Wickham was hit, I think. He certainly looked it.'

'Most extraordinary, Halsey. And you say the boy listened as if he liked it?'

'Lapped it up, I should say.'

'Humph! I think I had better see him myself before it wears off.'

'You let him alone,' advised the astute flag lieutenant. 'With the best of intentions, you may rub him the wrong way. Give the old man's oration time to settle before you go stirring things up. I shouldn't wonder if you were a better executive officer than a midshipman's uncle.'

'So Tony took it standing up!' said Magowan, ignoring the rebuke.

'Like the boy who stood on the burning deck whence all but him had fled.'

'That explains why he was so anxious to murder Derby Powell yesterday and so willing to kiss and make up to-day,' observed the uncle. 'I am a thousand times obliged to you, Halsey. I don't know when anything has pleased me more.'

Before going to bed Magowan reviewed the day's events. His mood was mellowed and somewhat apologetic. Here was one ordeal in which Midshipman Wickham had behaved without fear and without reproach.

'I have no more hard feeling against him, thank God,' murmured this devoted uncle before he fell asleep, 'but I shall proceed to try out a theory.'

The midshipmen mobilizing on the bleachers the next afternoon were surprised and diverted when Lieutenant Commander Magowan came on the field in football gear. To them his prowess as a Navy tackle was no more than a legend. 'Pop' Farwell eyed this solid, muscular veteran with more respect.

'Out for exercise, Captain Magowan?' he shouted. 'Fine business! You look as if you might teach the squad a few things. Will you coach the tackles?'

'I prefer to play in the line, if you don't mind, Pop.'

Commander Douglas Knapp drawled: 'Dave, old man, guess again. You will leave no widow and children, but please have a thought for your loving friends. Why, you old fool, these terriers will break you in two.'

Undismayed, Magowan hummed aloud:

> Stand, Navy, down the field,
> Sails set to the sky.

'The game isn't nearly so rough as when you and I played it, Doug. This looks more like basket-ball to me. What will you bet I can't go the route?'

'A dozen golf balls — or would you rather have me say it with flowers?'

'Pull Derby Powell out of the line,' said the unterrified Magowan, 'and let me go in against Wickham.'

'Ah, ha, I get you,' exclaimed Doug Knapp in tones of respect. 'I overlooked your well-known horse sense.'

'Bystanders will steer shy,' advised Magowan. 'If I act rough, no warning me off the field, understand? All I know is old-fashioned football.'

Midshipman Wickham looked on with no signs of alarm. It occurred to him that this might be the scheme of punishment which his middle-aged tyrant of an uncle had threatened to inflict. He must have gone crazy. Football was a different game from boxing with the Jack Crouch twin. His nephew would do his best to prove it. There was nothing half-hearted in Tony's intentions, no handicap of shadowy fears. He was very hostile and very earnest.

There were various accounts to be squared. One of them was intolerable. He had been told that he was a coward and a liar. David Magowan had promised to give him satisfaction. This, evidently, was the time and the place.

Derby Powell was about to relinquish his position in the line when Tony remarked, with a laugh:

'You won't have to loaf very long. I think I can make this old-timer wish he hadn't.'

'He doesn't look any too easy to me,' returned the observant plebe. 'Maybe you will be glad to see me back on the job.'

Leather helmet clapped on his head, blue jersey stretched tight on his powerful shoulders, David Magowan trotted over to run through the signal drill. His matured mind, trained to hard

tasks, soon grasped the technique of these shifting formations. Signals? He lived with intricate codes of signals every day, flag hoists, blinker, semaphore. It was child's play to memorize the code of numbers as rattled off by a vociferous quarter back.

'Pop' Farwell stepped up to suggest, in confidence:

'With this nippy cool weather and a game three days off, I shall give the outfit a good stiff dose of it this afternoon. Better drop out when you begin to feel tuckered.'

'Thanks. I am rather hoping you may have to shove a man into Tony Wickham's place.'

'You *are* the affectionate uncle, Captain Magowan,' grinned the coach. 'And Tony looks as if he loved you just about as much. Let's go.'

The two elevens scattered for the kick-off. A long, twisting punt and Tony Wickham was down the field like a flash. The full back of the first eleven caught the ball on the run and was in full stride when a flying end rush dived at him and missed his tackle. Unimpeded, the agile runner increased his pace while David Magowan came sprinting along in the nick of time to clear the road for him. It was superb interference, brushing aside one adversary after another, tip-

ping them over as if they had collided with a rock.

Tony Wickham tried to lunge in and bring the runner down. He was seldom foiled in a situation like this. Magowan turned to meet him. It appeared to be a head-on impact. Tony rebounded. He pitched upon his face and turned a somersault. Magowan reeled, but kept his feet and swept onward until the runner was dragged down from behind and lost his grip on the ball which was recovered by an opposing player.

Magowan's nephew picked himself up rather slowly. The terrific collision had shaken him. He moved like a man who had fallen off a roof. He hobbled into line for the opening scrimmage, determined to even matters. The two lines confronted each other, crouching, tense, awaiting the word. The quarter back yelped his mysterious jargon. It was a drive at tackle. Tony had to charge ahead to make a hold for his half back to struggle through. As though divining the play, Magowan jumped forward and drove his shoulder into Tony's chest.

Tall and heavy as he was the midshipman staggered back. Instead of opening the way he was blocking it. He was thrust into the path of the charging formation which stumbled and

crashed down over him. Into the ruck plunged Magowan and nailed the man with the ball before he could gain a yard.

Buried beneath three or four players, Tony Wickham was hauled out by this ferocious kinsman of his who growled in his ear:

'Who said you could play football? Now stand up and get knocked down again, you counterfeit.'

The midshipman made no retort. His jaw was set. In his eye was a wicked gleam. It was not the aspect of a young man who was likely to curl up and quit. Here was no vexing question of rank or uniform. They would proceed to find out which was the better man, once and for all. On the next down Tony was not caught off his guard. His elbow swung to smite his uncle under the chin and rattle his teeth. Tit for tat! If David Magowan wanted this kind of football, he could have it.

With the open tactics of the modern game it was easily possible for the midshipmen on the bleachers to discern that the feature of the afternoon was going to be the battle between First Classman Wickham and this hero of other days. The lieutenant commander was a popular officer in the department of seamanship. Partisanship

was divided and so they cheered them both. Past and present! The fire and resilience of youth against the seasoned wisdom of age! It was an event quite out of the ordinary.

And now Magowan astonished them by bursting through the line with the ball tucked under his arm. In spite of the cannon-ball momentum he kept his feet and craftily dodged the second line of defense. One pair of hands clutched his waist, but he shook himself free. It was incredible, but only the full back was left to intercept him. This obstruction he bowled over like a man of straw. He ran like a stampeding buffalo with a pack of wolves galloping in chase.

The fastest sprinter of the second eleven was overhauling him. They went down together no more than fifteen yards from the goal line. Magowan had covered thirty-five yards in his gallant sortie. His mud-besmeared countenance indicated that he was almost as much surprised as his opponents. The captain of the Navy eleven slapped him on the back. 'Pop' Farwell danced an impromptu jig and roared:

'At 'em again, skipper! Hurroo for the old Navy. You can show these babies something. Who said you were stiff in the knees?'

This armored cruiser of the old Navy was tre-

mendously elated to discover that he could still play football with the best of them. No board of survey could condemn *him* as obsolete. The ardor of the game took hold of him. It went to his head like wine. He was the war horse that heard the trumpets sound. Forgotten was the purpose of solving the problem of Midshipman Anthony Wickham. He, Dave Magowan, was playing football for the Navy.

From the bleachers the jubilant ranks of the regiment shouted plaudits of:

Ray! Ray! Gangway!
Ray! Ray! Gangway!
U. S. N. A.!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
Magowan! Magowan! Magowan!

One spectator found no cause for enthusiasm. This was the implacable nephew. He chewed the cud of bitterness and was not deflected from his own single-minded purpose which was to scupper the armored cruiser as a total loss. Therefore he took occasion in the next mêlée, when they were on the ground together, to place his fist where it would do the most good. This he judged to be just behind David Magowan's left ear. The rules of football etiquette be hanged! They had been

suspended by mutual consent. This was a strictly private affair, as prearranged.

Magowan came up, not smiling, but still unchecked. He rubbed a sore spot behind his ear and made gestures at the quarter back.

Fifteen yards to go for a touchdown!

The old-timer would show them how to put it across the line. He dropped back a few feet, took the ball and rammed straight into the thick of it. No forward passes or other fancy evolutions for him when the team had to score. Habit was too strong. He was, in spirit, the battering-ram of fifteen years gone by who had smashed the Army defense when a touchdown was imperative.

Three yards gained!

He pulled himself to his feet and was ready and eager to try it again. Smash, bang, and he had made use of a delayed pass to assault the other wing of the swaying line.

Four yards more!

His comrades were with him heart and soul, welded together to shove him through hell or high water. His spirit inspired them. Nothing could have stopped them.

One more down and they jammed him through for two yards more. He would listen to no suggestions of feinting to deceive the other team.

Let 'em know where it was coming, he grunted. All together and roll straight over Tony Wickham, between guard and tackle.

Ahead they went, Magowan with the ball. He ripped the defensive formation apart, still moving with two or three men on his back, but not brought down until the ball was over the line and the touchdown won.

'Huh! Not so worse,' he puffed when he emerged. 'That's how we used to put the fear of God into 'em.'

It was not boasting, but a simple statement of fact. The team which had been scored on failed to share his satisfaction. The episode was extremely irritating. It would not happen again. They conferred with their heads together. The obvious strategy was to direct their heavy offensive plays against this dangerous Magowan person and take some of the surplus steam out of him.

This was heartily endorsed by Anthony Wickham. He was a revengeful young man when he joined the fray after the next kick-off. Magowan realized that he had blundered in scoring that touchdown all by himself. It had taken a good deal out of him. And Tony Wickham, confound him, was as fresh as a daisy.

The middle-aged volunteer felt an unhappy sense of foreboding. Had the pitcher gone too often to the well? He concluded to attempt no more sensational feats with the ball. Perhaps he had lost some of his youthful endurance. This was harder work than fighting three rounds to a finish.

The sweat was rolling from his face. He was leg weary. His movements were a shade less aggressive. He was not so fast when the ball was put in play. He wondered if Tony had observed this.

Yes, Tony was vigilant to perceive that the tide had turned and he was quick to take advantage of it. There was no thought of mercy. Give David Magowan a chance to ease up and he might regain his speed and pugnacity. A whirlwind play for a gain through tackle, and Tony spilled him to one side. Then followed one bruising shock after another, the midshipman plunging into the older man with all his weight and strength and skill. When Magowan fell, he fell hard. Tony very efficiently attended to that.

Magowan forbore to use his fists. This would never do, in the presence of the crowd of cheering midshipmen. It was a contest of muscle and brawn and courage, just such a contest as An-

thony Wickham had flinched from facing in the West Point game with Bernie Crouch as his adversary.

It is well enough known that a football player can be literally battered out of a game without using foul tactics. This was what was happening to David Magowan. The formations were stamping sheer over him. The supremacy had passed to the tall, dashing midshipman. He was outplaying the veteran. More than this, he was wearing him down. Waged in a different manner it was as decisive a test as had been fought on the barn floor in Kensington. Magowan endured it grimly, tenaciously, because he did not know how to do anything else.

'Haven't you got about enough of it?' snarled the youngster as he watched the veteran try to rally.

'Enough to please any reasonable man,' panted his uncle, 'but I guess I can keep scrapping along somehow.'

A deft hip lock and toss and Tony threw him under the feet of the charging interference. He raised himself to one knee, winced, and paused there without trying to regain his feet.

'Hurt?' sneered Tony.

'No, tired. You have shaken me up.'

'I meant to. Sorry I hit you behind the ear a while ago. I didn't have to. I thought everything went in this family fracas.'

'That was all right, Tony. I invited it. As you say, you didn't have to slug me. My stomach feels queer. I am afraid I shall have to call it a day.'

'Are you whipped?' fiercely demanded the midshipman.

'Done to a turn, Tony. My Lord, if you will play football like that all the time the Army can't stop you. I got the jump on you at first because you were rattled.'

The coach ran out to call a halt and rest his weary players. Tony Wickham walked off the field with the vanquished veteran. They sat on a bench together and drew a blanket across their shoulders. The midshipman's enmity still smouldered. He offered no sympathy. David Magowan might be suffering acute bodily discomfort, but he was happier than when, with his one good eye, he had surveyed the fallen figure of the Crouch twin.

'I did my best to trim you to-day, Tony,' said he. 'Now supposing we figure out where we stand. I apologize for doubting your word. I was wrong.'

'Thank you for that, Uncle Dave. What about calling me a coward?'

'Never again. But I want to know how you feel about playing in the Army game.'

'Of course I'm going to play,' was the confident reply. 'You licked Jack Crouch and I can put it all over *you*. What's the sense in my being shy of Bernie Crouch any more? We laid that spook out flat this afternoon. Queer, wasn't it.'

'Devilish queer, Tony. It has been mighty rough on your uncle, but when it comes to hooking up cause and effect, he wins a mark of 4.0.'

CHAPTER X

THE MOMENT OF HESITATION

SQUADS of first classmen were hurrying down to the wharf to man a division of six sub-chasers for an afternoon's cruising drill in Chesapeake Bay. This taste of seagoing responsibility was much more enjoyable than routine work indoors. These craft, which were something like very small destroyers, had been turned out by the hundred during the war, hastily knocked together with some fanciful idea that they were fit to cross the ocean in. The pluck and hardihood of the Navy had achieved the improbable by taking flocks of them to Ireland, England, and as far away as the Adriatic where they operated against the enemy and annoyed him considerably.

A few of them, saved for the purpose, had been found useful at the Naval Academy, which had no other means of teaching midshipmen how to handle vessels, singly and in company. Lieutenant Commander Magowan was in charge of these operations afloat. He went out with the division, but kept his hands off as far as possible. It was good for the midshipman officers to get themselves into trouble and out again.

For the time being they were skippers, navigators, quartermasters, signalmen, and so on. If two sub-chasers bumped during evolutions, or one of them rammed the dock in trying to make a landing, Magowan viewed the damage as an item in the cost of education. They would not make the same mistake next time.

On this afternoon he selected S.C. 47 as his flagship because Tony Wickham was in command of it. With no more ill feeling between them there might be an opportunity to get better acquainted. Magowan was interested also in observing how his nephew measured up to this test of leadership, so different from anything he had experienced ashore or in the battleships during the summer cruises in foreign waters.

On deck the midshipmen had full swing, but the engines were in charge of enlisted machinists of the regular Navy who had much to contend with. Their cramped quarters reeked with gasoline fumes so that they frequently poked a head through a hatch for air. The motors were tricky and uncertain, demanding much attention and provocative of bitter profanity.

Making certain that his six warships were ready to shove off from the wharf, Magowan made the signal to go ahead. One by one they

slid out into the river, without confusion, and moved in column toward the wide bay. Midshipmen officers on deck and in the wheelhouses executed orders with dignity and precision. Admirals could have been no calmer, outwardly at least, when directing their ponderous squadrons.

Magowan found a canvas chair in a corner of S.C. 47 and smoked his pipe. The water was ruffled by a salty breeze from the eastward. The deck rolled a little. He felt contentment. He soon tired of shore-going billets. They should be given to the married men.

Keeping their stations fairly well, the other sub-chasers followed the flagship until the expanse of water widened and there was room to put them through their paces. Then, as Magowan gave the orders, the flag hoist began to flutter its signals to the youthful commanders.

The sub-chasers wheeled out of column, three turning to the right and three to the left. They were playing a game of battle tactics. One was slower than another, perhaps, or made a blundering turn. The signal had been misunderstood or the commander was not alert enough.

Like a fleet in miniature, they scattered, reformed, or moved in two squadrons in response to

the flagship's bright bits of bunting that flew from the stumpy mast. Once a collision seemed inevitable, but a horror-smitten helmsman snatched his bow out of the way in the nick of time while the two skippers cordially damned each other as nautical prunes.

As commander of the flagship, Anthony Wickham displayed no uneasiness whatever, even though he was under the sternly critical eye of David Magowan. The group of midshipmen stationed between the wheelhouse and the flag locker were quick to obey Tony's orders. He knew what should be done and how to do it. If a mistake was made he rebuked the offender and pointed out the error of his ways. It was the knack of shaking down a crew and inspiring confidence which is partly innate and partly the result of training. Some officers never acquire it. To the end they are martinets and not leaders.

'Wake up S.C. 38, and ask him why he didn't make that ninety-degree turn, Mr. Wickham,' said Magowan.

'Yes, sir. That is "Dinky" Harrison. He is weak on signals. Shall I bawl him out?'

'With my compliments, Mr. Wickham.'

'Yes, sir. I'll burn him up. That outfit seems to think their old scow is out for a joy ride.'

Presently the erring sister, S.C. 38, flung a plaintive message to the breeze.

'*Disabled. Please stand by.*'

'Just like Dinky Harrison,' grumbled Commander Tony Wickham. 'Hoodooed, as usual. Now he *has* crabbed the game for the rest of us.'

'You can't fairly blame him for engine-room trouble,' mildly suggested Magowan.

This was true enough, but Tony's professional zeal was so keen that he had to scold somebody for spoiling the show. Magowan glanced at his watch. It would soon be time to work inshore from the wide reaches of the bay and proceed into the river to disembark the midshipmen. Otherwise they would be late for infantry drill. There was no such word as tardiness in the Academy lexicon.

'I will send four sub-chasers in,' said Magowan, 'and we can stand by 38 to tow her if necessary.'

'Yes, sir,' replied his nephew. 'Shall I make a signal to that effect?'

Magowan nodded. The four chasers, released from further evolutions, formed in column and foamed homeward. The flagship headed for the disabled S.C. 38 and slackened speed to hail her.

Commander Dinky Harrison, looking hot and worried, wiped a smudge of grease from his face and called across to the commander-in-chief:

'I have been below, sir, and the engineers say they can hook her up in fifteen or twenty minutes to go ahead at half speed. Will you stay with us or go along in?'

'I had better wait and see if you really get under way,' replied Magowan. 'Those engines are infernally unreliable when they begin to throw fits.'

A large, sad man in a checked jumper squeezed his shoulders through a hatch. As chief guardian to the mechanical madhouse below decks he felt himself entitled to be heard.

'Say, Captain Magowan, the guy that built this bunch of junk ought to be made to eat it. These boats may have been all right when they were new, but they have aged since then.'

'So would you, Tompkins, if you had waltzed across the Atlantic in one of them. What do you think about my standing by?'

'Better had, sir. You never can tell. It's been leakin' gasoline somewheres down here until I can spit it raw. That slows up repair work. The air is fouler than usual.'

'Aye, aye, Tompkins. I have told Mr. Harri-

son that I will stay with you to escort or tow, as the case may be.'

The machinist vanished with a noise of language. The flagship rocked idly, a few yards distant from the luckless 38 whose midshipman commander and staff appeared subdued and chagrined, as though they were really responsible for the mishap. From his own ship Commander Anthony Wickham scowled at them. They were a crowd of dubs who had failed to snap out of it even before the breakdown in the engine-room.

No more than fifteen minutes passed before the stentorian accents of the chief machinist announced:

'Let's go! She can turn up five or six knots if we nurse her tenderly.'

Much relieved, Magowan told the flagship to go ahead — standard speed five knots, keeping abreast of 38 until they should reach the mouth of the river. The two vessels crept slowly over the burnished surface of the bay. The wind was dying. To Magowan it was merely an incident of the day's work.

Something out of the ordinary happened, suddenly, without warning. The flagship heard the muffled sound of an explosion in the engine-room of S.C. 38. Flame and black smoke gushed from

the hatches and ventilators. The chief machinist emerged a moment later. His face was masked with soot, the hair burned from his head. His checked jumper was scorched and smouldering. In a frenzy of pain and terror he dived overboard, yelling for help as he went down. He came up swimming strongly, as buoyant as a porpoise, and struck out for the flagship.

A life buoy was flung at him. He thrust one arm through it and paddled to the side of the vessel, groaning as he clutched the bow line that was dropped over his shoulders. Magowan heard him say:

'The gas from that leak blew up. If she takes fire the fuel tanks will go next. Then all hands'll be out o' luck.'

He had been literally blown out of the engine-room when he had started to jump for the hatch. Where was his mate, the other machinist? This was Magowan's first question as the midshipman hauled the derelict on deck.

'God knows, sir. Aft, I think. He was clear of the blast, but he may have been gassed or stunned.'

The engines of 38 had stopped. She drifted with dying headway. Her midshipman commander and his comrades had stood bewildered,

wondering what to do. They were frightened, but there was no sign of panic. Three years of inflexible discipline, of the doctrines and traditions of the Navy, steadied them in such an emergency as this. By habit they looked to their superior officer, Lieutenant Commander Magowan, to give the orders.

With amazing swiftness the wooden, paint-covered bulkheads and timbers had caught fire. The smoke now billowing from the forward hatch was gray, with eddies of sparks. The deckhouse would kindle next and blaze like a torch. The whole vessel was inflammable. There was no hose to fight it with, only the few buckets in a rack.

Magowan perceived that the job in hand was to get the midshipmen off before the fuel tanks exploded and blew the doomed sub-chaser to kingdom come. It was a needless risk to jam his own ship alongside. He shouted to the waiting, silent midshipmen to jump for it. Some of his own crew rushed to drop a skiff overboard. No danger of these castaways drowning. The Academy had taught them to swim.

Magowan counted them as they splashed into the bay. All accounted for. Then he bethought himself of the machinist's mate who was some-

where below decks in 38. The man might be alive. The after part of the vessel had not yet caught fire.

Clearly, instantly, Magowan knew what he ought to do, what he intended to do. This was to get aboard of 38 and try to find the missing machinist before it was too late, before a fuel tank exploded and tore the vessel to bits. There was no time to delay or hesitate.

And yet for a moment he did hesitate, this officer who had never flinched from danger, whose courage was a proven quantity, a thing recognized in the Service. He wore ribbons in testimony of it.

He hesitated to put his ship close enough to the burning sub-chaser so that he could jump on board. Before his vision flashed a hideous picture — of his naval yacht Tarpon of the Breton patrol blown up by a torpedo — shattered decks and mangled men — flying débris — the sucking swirl of the sea that pulled the stricken ship down with half her crew.

It was a vision that had haunted him until time had mercifully dimmed it. Now it seldom came to trouble him. Here it was again, vivid in every detail, like a picture on a screen. It made him hesitate. It held him with invisible hands.

Only for a moment, but in this moment he comprehended what it was to be mastered by fear, to shrink from a shadow, to have the past rush out from ambush to strike him.

His demeanor did not betray it. He stood solid and composed, the figure of a man whom no circumstances could daunt. Before he could wrest himself free of this fleeting hesitation, Tony Wickham stepped up to him with that jaunty, devil-may-care air which became him so well. Almost carelessly he said:

'I am ready to put the ship close aboard, sir. Of course we've got to find that missing man. The other midshipmen want me to tell you they are glad to go to it.'

'Yes, Tony. I was about to give you the order. Lively, now.'

Magowan spoke hastily, as though startled. He had come out of his dreadful trance. It was his own secret. He was himself again. Anthony Wickham, however, had snatched the initiative from him. The lieutenant commander leaped into the wheelhouse and thrust the boyish helmsman aside. The flagship moved slowly into the smoke that poured from the foredeck and superstructure of S.C. 38. The fire seemed to have invaded the compartment in which was one of the large gasoline fuel tanks.

The hulls of the two vessels ground against each other. Magowan jumped for the deck of 38, but Tony Wickham was quicker. He was scrambling to his feet when Magowan alighted beside him. They looked at each other and smiled. Magowan turned to shout to his own ship:

'Move ahead and get out of this. Throw your wheel over and give her full speed. Sheer off a safe distance and stand by.'

A competent midshipman jumped to swing the flagship away. She moved out of danger. Tony Wickham was making for the after hatch when his uncle pulled him back.

'What's your hurry, son? I go first. The senior officer has the preference.'

'But this is *my* chance, Uncle Dave. You know what I mean.'

'Hell's bells, haven't you proved it already?' Magowan roared at him. 'Hanged if I'll follow any midshipman below in a burning ship.'

Tony yielded. The argument was sound. They paused to pull off their blouses and wrap them around their heads. When the lieutenant commander slid down into the gas and smoke the midshipman came tumbling upon his broad shoulders. So thick was the vapor that they were unable to see. It choked them. The heat

was appalling. But there were no flames to sear and slay them.

Magowan groped and stumbled, holding fast to Tony's hands for fear they might lose each other. They found an open port through which the cooler air drew in. It somewhat revived them. The light from it filtered into the noxious murk, a faint shaft of illumination. It sufficed to reveal the body of the machinist huddled in a corner like a bundle of rags.

Tony's breath wheezed and gurgled. There was no strength in him. But Magowan shouted heartening words in his ear and gripped his arm, a strong voice and a strong grip. Stooping low, Magowan picked up the limp body of the machinist and flung it over his shoulder. Staggering, coughing, he fought his way toward the hatch.

Tony shoved from behind. They were so near dropping in their tracks that it was touch and go whether they could regain the deck.

'Up you go, Tony,' spluttered Magowan. 'If I get stuck in the hatch with this bird, it's all over. If you can make it, lie flat and pull like the devil.'

The midshipman obeyed. He clawed his way up, slipping back and trying it again. From below Magowan hoarsely rumbled at him. The

blessed air on deck gave the exhausted midshipman new strength. He flopped down and was able to catch hold of the machinist by the shoulders. He hoisted the body a little and so relieved Magowan of the weight of the burden. The sturdy lieutenant commander was breathing the sweeter air by now and he could push and heave to some purpose.

Up he came, grasping the machinist around the legs. Tony and he together made one more effort and they were safely delivered from the inferno below.

'Do you want our ship to come back for us?' huskily whispered Tony whose eyes were blinded with smoke.

'Not on your life!' croaked Magowan. 'Once was enough to risk it. Wigwag 'em to let the skiff drift down. Tie a life belt around the machinist. They can fish him out before he drowns, if he isn't dead already. This hooker is about due to blow herself to hell and gone. No sense in losing any midshipmen.'

The bold midshipmen thought otherwise. For once they defied orders. They were not such poor sports as to let Tony Wickham and the skipper shift for themselves. And so they drove the flagship full tilt for S.C. 38. The vessels came to-

gether with a splintering crash. The flagship's bow ripped deep into the smoking deck. A dozen eager pairs of hands were ready to drag the imperiled men to safety. This was accomplished in a jiffy.

Then the flagship backed out and opened up clear water as rapidly as possible. She was perhaps a hundred yards distant when the luckless S.C. 38 lifted with a prodigious detonation and seemed to fly apart in blazing fragments. What was left of the devastated hull filled and plunged under the foaming surface.

Magowan was stretched on deck. He did not raise his head to look. He did not wish to look. A tremor passed through his stalwart frame. He was thinking of that moment of hesitation.

Presently he pulled himself together and gave directions for taking the ship into the river and up to the wharf. Tony Wickham had crawled into a bunk. The other midshipmen were ready to show Magowan that there were plenty of able commanders aboard. The chief machinist came up to report:

'For a dead one that mate of mine looks as if he might have a kick in him yet. He opened his eyes just now. I can't find any bad burns on him. Unless the gas burned his tubes out, he may live to borrow more money off me.'

'Fine! How about you, Tompkins?' said Magowan. 'You look like a singed cat.'

'The fortune of war, sir. Who wouldn't sell a farm and go to sea in a sub-chaser?'

As soon as the vessel was tied up at the wharf, Magowan went down to the stateroom, where he found Tony Wickham sitting up and mopping his face with wet towels. He was red-eyed and had a complexion like a smoked ham, but reported that he could find no serious damage.

'I hope you are the same, Uncle Dave. Blistered hands, I see, and your nose looks like a cigar-lighter.'

'Superficial defects, son. No structural weakness. I'll telephone for a car. You had better stay in your room and send for the doctor. He may want to put you in the sick bay overnight.'

'Hadn't you better go in dock yourself, sir?'

'Oh, I'll get in a tub and change my clothes. No use of fretting about my nose. My good looks have been hit by one disaster after another. Well, we turned the trick, Tony.'

'You bet we did. That guy was too good a machinist to lose.'

They were silent, but not because a wall of constraint stood between them. Each had his own thoughts. For David Magowan, every

doubt of his nephew's intrinsic courage was forever obliterated. Yes, that one apparent flaw had not been a flaw, but a misfortune. And now Magowan was able to understand what his nephew had suffered and why. The past is never dead. That moment of hesitation? Yes, he, David Magowan, had been afraid. And before he could banish the vision that had made him waver, Anthony Wickham had been first to obey the compelling impulse of duty and honor.

The midshipman's thoughts were mirrored in words when he said, with proud affection:

'I'll tell you now, Uncle Dave, that I was pretty well razzled trying to screw myself up to hopping aboard that darned old blazing subchaser. It didn't look any too good to me, but I saw you standing there all set to jam in close and go after the machinist. It was just the kind of thing you were bound to do. Then I woke up and tried to beat you to it. Nothing like an example to buck a fellow up in a mess like that.'

'Did I call you a coward, Tony?' said his uncle, with deeper feeling than he was accustomed to show. 'Again I ask you to forgive and forget. I came nearer to being a coward this afternoon than you ever did. So there's that.'

'Oh, bunk,' was the rude comment. 'You

can't feed me any of that stuff. You may be shy of your good looks, but your modesty is still one hundred per cent. The only time I ever heard you brag was when you said you could whip the tar out of me.'

'That was the result of a complex, Tony.'

'What's that? You are too old-fashioned to fall for that rot.'

'Call it a riddle, then. I did not really finish checking up the answer until this afternoon.'

CHAPTER XI

THE FATHER-AND-SON DINNER PARTY

It is one thing to solve a problem to your own satisfaction, but quite another to convert the world to the same opinion. Such has been the sad experience of martyrs, reformers, and dogs with a bad name. Midshipman Anthony Wickham, for instance, was taking too much for granted in assuming that his football career would be henceforth unclouded. This he discovered not many days after his convalescence from the adventure aboard the lost S.C. 38.

He was playing with his whole heart in it, tremendously determined to make good and atone for the failures of the past. He felt that everything was staked on this supreme endeavor. They had called him a quitter, a flash in the pan. He would show them.

He was happier than at any time since plebe year. It was like finding bright weather after a stormy and somber cruise.

Disillusionment came when he happened to overhear a conversation in the gymnasium. He had gone to the office of the physical director on

an errand and was waiting just inside the door when 'Pop' Farwell and Commander Douglas Knapp came along the corridor. They halted to finish an argument before entering the room.

'I can't possibly see it,' said the coach, 'even if he is putting up the game of his life. Once bitten, twice shy. That's me.'

'I think you are wrong this time, Pop,' insisted Commander Knapp. 'My hunch is that Tony will stick it out this season. Dave Magowan feels the same way.'

'What does that amount to? Magowan is his uncle, isn't he, and hipped on the kid? Just because Tony Wickham stood him on his head in practice, Magowan can't see anybody else in there at tackle. This is Magowan's first year of duty at the Academy. He hasn't seen his precious nephew go up like a balloon just when we had the team going strong for the Army game. Don't let Dave influence you. He doesn't mean to meddle, but this is *our* funeral, understand?'

Unreasonable, perhaps, but Anthony Wickham refused to accept the cruel verdict as final. It could not even discourage him. The goal was just so much harder to achieve, but he refused to admit that it was beyond his reach. It meant ever so much more to him than the honor of

playing football in the Army game. The odds against you made the bigger game of life worth while. This was the revelation that tempered him like good steel.

He said nothing about it in his letters home. The whole thing was much too difficult to try to explain. The only person who could understand it was David Magowan. Tony did let his father know, however, that he had become more interested in the Academy and in a naval career than in the prospect of getting rich as a partner in the Morris Wickham Company. It was tactfully conveyed, with expressions of lively gratitude, also the suggestion that they could thrash it out during Christmas leave.

Mr. Morris Wickham was not a man to delay thrashing out anything. 'Do it to-day — to-morrow may never come,' read a neatly lettered card on his desk. As usual he was rushed with affairs, but the bigger, better, busier Kensington was compelled to rock along without him while he whizzed down to Annapolis for a father-and-son conference.

Tony met him for dinner at Carvel Hall and was, at first, provokingly, politely reticent, very much on his dignity as a first classman. To the stout, jovial, rather noisy parent, this was a new

attitude. He had often referred to the fact, in speeches at the Kensington Boys' Club, that Tony and he were a regular pair of buddies.

On this occasion, however, the midshipman buddy was more like a formal guest. Morris Wickham told some excellent stories — he was always picking up new ones — but this did not seem to thaw the young man into a confidential mood. At length, the elder buddy exclaimed, in his breezy manner:

'Let's get down to brass tacks, Tony, old scout. No time to waste. I must catch the midnight express out of Baltimore. Important engagement in New York to-morrow morning. Your recent letters have been unsatisfactory. You are losing your interest. Slowing up. Punch all gone. Where's the old pep?'

'How do you get that way?' bluntly countered Tony, who was taken by surprise. 'Why, I am sure I told you how much more interested I was in the Academy.'

'Perhaps you did. That isn't what I am driving at. Interest in affairs at home — in my business plans — in the big, worth-while stuff, Tony. Why, you have even been hinting that you wanted to get out from under, to quit me cold. I laughed, but it worried me.'

'You don't really need me, do you, dad?' thoughtfully inquired the son, after a pause. 'Supposing I have changed my mind since I saw you last. Is it honestly a question of duty to stand by in this business game of yours? You have made enough money to take care of mother and yourself, haven't you? You can retire whenever you like and have enough to go on?'

'What red-blooded he-man wants to retire?' snorted Morris Wickham. 'Of course I could sell out for big money. But you bet your sweet life I can keep the plant humming all by myself if you decide to fly off at some fool tangent or other.'

'That settles it,' announced the younger buddy, with an air of relief. 'Then you don't really need me. So you may as well know that I intend to do my darnedest to get my commission in the Navy.'

This was brutally direct. It hit Morris Wickham between the eyes. He was extraordinarily angry, but strove to dissemble it. A philanthropist who hailed each morning as a glad new day and every man as his brother could not afford to lose his temper. To laugh it off was the better way. Therefore he exclaimed:

'Ha, ha, when I was your age I changed my mind every few minutes. A mighty good thing

I came down to talk it over with you as man to man. What you need is a change of air.'

Intensely irritated by the patronizing tone, the midshipman flung back:

'You ought to stay here long enough to let some of this air blow through you. It is different from Kensington. Talk as long as you like. I will listen, of course. But you will be spilling so many useless words. It is the Navy for mine.'

'That ossified idiot, Dave Magowan, has been twisting you round his finger,' blurted Morris Wickham, hitting the table with his fist. His resemblance to a Big Brother was in danger of eclipse. He looked more like an apoplectic parent defied by an utterly exasperating nincompoop of a son.

'Dave Magowan did try to twist me, on Farragut Field,' said Tony, 'but he didn't get very far with it. You must not cuss him, dad. In fact, he has said very little to me about the Service. I do think a lot of him. He is a perfect corker.'

'Tony, your mother will be terribly upset over this. She will blame Dave. You were all right until he came to the Academy this year. He is in wrong with her now. He came up to see us and disgraced himself in some sort of a mucker row. Your mother was in a state of mind over that.

Then Dave capped the climax by stealing her perfectly good butler. If you understand feminine psychology, my boy, that was the mortal offense. Now you see what this crazy notion of yours is bound to do — smash all my hopes of your future — break your mother's heart and bust up the whole damn family.'

'Some casualties,' remarked the obdurate midshipman. 'The butler survived it. Maybe I shall. I saw him to-day, Chief Petty Officer McIntyre, boatkeeper at the Dewey Basin, and tickled to death with his job. On the level, dad, you are behaving as if I were going to queer myself and lead a life of disgusting crime. That is not a diplomatic line to pull in Annapolis. You shout it a little louder and the populace is liable to run you out of town. What's the matter with the Navy?'

'It is the wrong place for you,' said Morris Wickham, a little chastened. 'Straight from the shoulder is my motto, Tony. If you go your own gait you will never get another dollar out of me. What is your pay when you get a commission? Eighteen hundred or so? Less than I pay a good mechanic, less than Big John Crouch earns in the foundry. And there you stick for years, as an ensign or something, and can't call your soul your

own, by George. You are in debt, I presume. Most kids are. Expected to pass the buck to me after graduation, eh?'

'Sure I did. But not now,' was the cheerful response. 'The devil take your money. I can square up my own debts out of my princely pay as an ensign. I may decide to marry on it and have seven or six children.'

It was a clean break with a father who idolized him. Morris Wickham could not bear to contemplate such a parting of the ways as this. He was an emotional man whose affections were close to the surface. Into his eyes came the hurt, bewildered look of a grieving child as he said:

'If Dave Magowan didn't switch you, Tony, please tell me what did. God knows I have nothing but your best interests at heart. That is all a dad wants, to give a boy a better start than he had. It is what keeps this old world moving along. You can't call me an unreasonable man. I never tried to bulldoze you in my life. Now come off the high horse and tell me what's happened to you.'

Tony's hard mood softened. He felt very sorry for his father. He fumbled inside his blouse and drew out a long envelope. It contained a letter

which he handed to his father with the explanation:

'From the Secretary of the Navy, commending Midshipman Anthony Wickham for conspicuously gallant conduct in saving life on board the S.C. 38. This letter is worth more to me, dad, than a million dollars of anybody's money. It will go on my record as a naval officer. Does that help to put you wise to how I feel about the Service?'

Morris Wickham read the letter with the most earnest attention. He was immensely impressed. This was quite evident. David Magowan's ribbons had meant very little to him. He had no imagination.

'From the Secretary of the Navy himself!' he ejaculated, regarding his conspicuously gallant son with an air of proud ownership. 'Why in time didn't you write home about it?'

'A nice thing to shoot your face about!' was the scornful reply. 'And I haven't heard you cheering the Navy for some time. This letter happens to be a part of my argument. Get that? What do I care if the job doesn't roll up the cash? Isn't there a heap of satisfaction in a stunt like that? And nobody in the Academy hurled any bouquets at me. It was in the line of duty. That's

all. Dave Magowan was the star performer. I just tagged along. A letter like this doesn't mean much to him. He can paper a wall with 'em. But it helps me make a decent finish at the Academy even if I did get off to a poor start.'

'Have a cigar, Tony?' respectfully murmured his parent. 'Oh, I forgot you are in training. If you only had time to go up to my room — we could peel off our coats and make ourselves comfortable and discuss this proposition without going to the mat about it.'

'Yes, sir. I wish I could. But this isn't so bad. It begins to have the symptoms of a father-and-son dinner party.'

CHAPTER XII

GIVE A DOG A BAD NAME

THE football season battered its way, week by week and game by game, toward the climax of the West Point contest, the Blue against the Gray. 'Pop' Farwell experimented with his rush line, substituting this man or that, endeavoring to weld them into the unified spirit and flexible interaction of *the team*. His back field caused him no loss of sleep. If needs be he could throw in two sets of fast and aggressive backs, quick-witted veterans and hard to stop.

More than once Derby Powell was taken out of the line and then put back again. Whatever his faults might be, he was essentially dependable, day in and day out, standing up under punishment and striving to profit by it. The nervous strain of being a plebe had ceased to wear on him. He was a glutton for football. In truth, he had to be in order to endure the efforts of Tony Wickham to wrest the tackle position from him.

Lieutenant Commander David Magowan looked on and felt more and more unhappy. He could not interfere nor could he explain to the

hard-headed coach the complicated case of Midshipman Anthony Wickham and his banished jinx. It was a fantastic yarn, and would no doubt be called an elaborate excuse to cover past failings. There was this to be hoped for, however, that if Tony should keep up his unflagging pace, if he showed no signs of the slump which had afflicted him in previous seasons, the coach might relent at the last minute and give him the chance to prove his mettle.

One night Tony trudged to his room after supper and dropped full length upon his cot. He was tired and very glum. Bill Satterlee was in a contrasting humor. This was one of the rare intervals when the harassed editor-in-chief of 'The Log' had actually caught up with the world instead of loping along two or three jumps behind it. He cocked his heels upon the table and sang in a quavering tenor voice:

> My bonnie is down in the laundry,
> My bonnie wee Maryland rose,
> My bonnie is down in the laundry
> A-washing the midshipmen's clothes.

Tony squirmed and rolled over on the cot. He could stand just about so much.

'Can it, Bill. If that noise means you're happy, I hope you get bad news from somewhere.'

The tuneful William smiled at the ceiling, drew a long breath, and began to warble:

'Twas in a Western water town
On a cold November day;
Beside an empty box car,
A dying hobo lay.

'I feel just like that. A dirge suits me, Bill,' plaintively remarked Midshipman Wickham. 'I shouldn't wonder if I could stand some more of "The Dying Hobo."'

'I sing it darned well. It fits my voice beautifully, Tony, old top. What's wrong with you? Why the flop?'

'Strained my back playing football this afternoon — a ligament or something. I am as stiff as a rusty hinge. Rubbing did it no good.'

'My advice is to lay off the game for two or three days. You will be no good unless you do.'

'Not on your life, Bill. I may limber up tomorrow. I can't afford to ease up. This is my last chance. Pop Farwell will take no alibi like a lame back from me. He has convinced himself that I can't stay the route, so there you are.'

'Well, you poor goof, if you go out and play all crippled up, what does that get you? Then he *will* think he was right and you have lost your punch.'

'I can't afford to quit even for a day,' insisted Tony. 'Bill, he has *got* to give me a show in the Army game and I'll make him think so yet.'

Midshipman Satterlee abandoned the useless argument and sang the rest of the ballad of 'The Dying Hobo.' His sympathy for his roommate was so deep that he dared not let himself go too far. He might turn soft and make a silly ass of himself. In his opinion, Tony's uphill fight was a wonderfully fine thing. It was the kind of spirit that was more precious than gold in an Army football game, but the coach simply could not see it that way.

Stiff and sore, Tony's prowess on the field was perceptibly dimmed during the next few days. He offered no excuses. His disability made Derby Powell's playing seem almost brilliant, a marked improvement over his previous form. The big plebe appeared to be the right choice, and once more Tony Wickham had shown a lack of stamina and grit. He could not stay through to the bitter end.

David Magowan met his nephew outside the gymnasium on the afternoon of the last practice of the season. The tall midshipman had no complaints to make. Fortune had been unkind, but

it could not shake his courage. He had been learning the lessons of adversity.

'Do you really feel fit again?' asked Magowan.

'Fit to pull Bancroft Hall up by the roots, sir. My back was lame just long enough to play the devil with things. Never mind, it might have made no difference. Pop Farwell had me blacklisted anyhow.'

'Losing a fight doesn't matter so much as the way a man takes it,' said David Magowan out of his own rugged experience. 'And you have not really lost, Tony. You and I know that. You have won the greatest thing of all, which is to be able to live with one's self without fear or shame. Keep a stiff upper lip and be sure to meet me for dinner in New York after the game.'

And now the joyous regiment, twenty-four hundred strong, was getting ready for its pilgrimage to the metropolis, all primed to 'sink the Army gray.' It was a sight worth going far to see, the early-morning march across the yard, when the dawn was breaking, to pile into the special trains. The Academy band of seventy pieces led the long blue-clad column.

Escorted by its chosen guardians the Navy goat trotted in leash and blatted defiance. No longer was its rich perfume wafted into the cor-

ridor from the cellar room in which this indispensable mascot had been stabled. He was now the goat rampant, symbol of all the bewhiskered, pugnacious goats which, from time immemorial, have voyaged the world in battleships and cruisers as the companions of the bluejackets of the seagoing Navy. Without him this football game would have been doomed before the kick-off.

More colorful than any of the great college contests of the autumn the pageantry of this event has been often described. The multitude of spectators crowding every inch of space, perhaps fifty thousand of them — the gray-clad ranks of West Point cadets faultless in drill and deportment, saluting the regiment of midshipmen as they swing into the grounds; the parade of the blanketed Army mule and his earnest, dynamic attempts to kick the Navy goat into the middle of next week; the brilliant assemblage of admirals, generals, cabinet members, and perhaps the President of the United States, gold braid and buttons in dazzling plenitude; and such lusty, well-drilled, incessant cheering by the young soldiers and sailors as seems fairly to split the sky. And all this the accompaniment of a football game fought with superb skill and in the

finest spirit of sportsmanship. The vast crowds, the stirring commotion, the bands, and the cheering meant almost nothing to Midshipman Anthony Wickham. He was scarcely conscious of them as he sat with the huddled group of substitutes.

The rival teams moved into position for the opening play of the game. Tony Wickham gazed across the field at one of the Army rush-line men, a black-haired, compact figure wonderfully alert. Football had no phantom fears for Bernie Crouch. He was cool and confident, never a hint of excitement or undue tension. Masterful was the word. He had yet to meet the man who could get the upper hand of him.

From one of the lower tiers of seats David Magowan was also gazing hard at the famous West Point tackle. The resemblance to young Jack, the other Crouch twin, was extraordinarily uncanny. Those three rounds of hard fighting in the barn, with Big John holding the watch, had come to naught, reflected Magowan. He had helped to make Tony Wickham a free man, but there was no breaking down the barrier to attain the goal of his desire. The irony of life! The injustice of its verdicts!

A great volume of sound rolled up from the

crowd. A Navy toe had lifted the ball from its hillock of sand in mid-field. The game was on. High above the din soared the piercing whoop of the midshipmen's siren cheer. Then began a period of indecisive struggle — a muddy field, two elevens as keen as hawks to smother almost every trick and stratagem before it gained momentum, tackling fierce and swift and low — interference smashed or driven back, long punts hurtling down the field. A brilliant run for the Navy was matched by a breathless forward pass for the Army. Neither goal line was endangered.

Shortly after play was resumed in the second period, Derby Powell came out of a scrimmage with a twisted ankle. He was sore in mind as well as body. Bernie Crouch had baffled him again and again. He could not hold the West Point veteran who stormed through to spoil formations or nail the runner in his tracks. 'Pop' Farwell waved a beckoning hand. Derby Powell limped from the field, an arm thrown across a comrade's shoulder for support. It was just as well that Mrs. Windsor F. Powell, of Cressfield, Ohio, was not present to behold her offspring at this tragic moment. Hazing could never have made such a ruin of him as this.

His freckles were obscured by moist black

earth which was irrigated by the tears that trickled down his cheeks, tears of heart-broken disappointment that his sun was so soon set. He tenderly caressed one ear as if suspecting that it hung only by a thread. The trainer washed his face. The doctor bathed and bandaged the swelling ankle.

'Good boy,' said the coach. 'You gave 'em all you had and as much as I could expect of you. Nobody thought you could play tag with Bernie Crouch.'

'He — he c-came pretty all-fired near p-playing tag with me,' blubbered the woeful plebe, 'and n-now I can't take another c-crack at him.'

'Pop' Farwell glanced along the row of substitutes. His eye coldly passed over the eager Tony Wickham and alighted on a rosy, fleshily built second classman who looked as if he might be difficult to tip over.

'Go in, Halloway. Do you want to live forever? Crumple this Bernie Crouch guy and show him what the Navy is. You can do it.'

Tony Wickham looked straight ahead of him. His lips twitched, but otherwise he betrayed no emotion. Tried and found wanting. Finally, irrevocably condemned. This was the sentence for which there was neither pardon nor reprieve.

But he had, at length, learned how to obey. And the best that the Academy could give him was expressed in this manly, unflinching acquiescence as he sat there and saw the lucky Halloway trot out to take his place in the Navy rush line and face Bernie Crouch.

It was another exhausting period of play in which neither eleven was able to score. A slippery ball and a fumble cost the Navy a touchdown when within a few yards of the goal posts. The Army was held for downs when within striking distance of the other end of the field. The first half of the game ended with victory still in the balance.

During the intermission, while the Navy team rested in the dressing-room, 'Pop' Farwell neither scolded nor abused them. Absurd to try to arouse more fighting spirit in the hearts of young men who were ready to die for their cause. He pointed out the mistakes and outlined different tactics. Tony Wickham he ignored, telling Halloway to go in again for the third period. The captain of the team began to protest, but the coach told him to save his breath.

When they filed out to return to the field, Tony followed in silence. The last glimmering ray of hope had been extinguished.

Halfway through this third period of play the Navy seemed to find its stride, as good teams sometimes will. The advance began from deep within its own territory. It drove ahead past one chalked line after another, as far as mid-field, and then unfalteringly into West Point's own area. End runs, forward passes, short gains through the line were reeled off with machine-like precision. At any moment the thousands of Navy partisans dreaded to see a cog slip.

The fatal mischance occurred when the ball had been carried within twenty-odd yards of the West Point goal. Then Bernie Crouch went flying through like a madman, black hair streaming, and tackled a Navy half back just as he doubled for one end of the line. The ball popped from his grasp and bounded crazily. A West Point man nabbed it like a terrier after a rat. The cog had slipped. The machine was halted.

And now the Army drove savagely ahead while the Navy retreated yard by yard with its morale unbroken. At length the Army was compelled to kick on the fourth down. It was a short, high punt, hurriedly executed. With the ball again in its possession the Navy forgot its exhaustion and hammered ahead, unbeaten, strong in the will to win. What had been done once could be done

again. This renewed advance was magnificent.

Then the nimble little Navy quarter back spied a gap and sped through it like a bullet. His muzzle velocity was terrific. He whizzed thirty yards before a brawny hand clutched his breeches and flipped him heels over head.

Before they lined up again 'Pop' Farwell shoved Tony Wickham forward and yelled in his ear:

'Go to it, you big four-flusher. You can't be much worse than Halloway. As soon as you turn yellow, I'll stick him in again.'

Tony turned on him with a snarl and a curse. Human endurance has its limits. The coach threw up his hands as if expecting to be assaulted. Tony's black scowl faded. This was no place for private quarrels. He stripped off his sweater and ran out to join his comrades. The Navy band was playing 'Anchors Aweigh.'

Stand, Navy, down the field,
Sails set to the sky.
We'll never change our course,
So, Army, you steer shy-y-y-y.

Thrown into the game as a stop-gap, a last resort, merely to give Halloway a breathing spell! Insulted by the coach! These hurts seemed petty, his resentment unworthy when Tony

heard the battle anthem of the Academy rise and fall in a great gale of melody. What did his feelings or his personal fortunes amount to? He was permitted to play for the Navy. Then there came rolling down to him the cadenced cheer of the regiment, defiant, uplifting:

Ray! Ray! Gangway!
Ray! Ray! Gangway!
U. S. N. A.! Rah! Rah! Rah!
Wickham! Wickham! Wickham!

There was a smile on his handsome face and his step was jaunty as he jumped into position. Truculent, contemptuous, Bernie Crouch tried to shake his confidence by exclaiming:

'Huh, I've been waiting three years for this. Got to lick you again, have I? That's a cinch. It will be the ambulance this time, all right.'

The quarter back yelled a signal at the top of his voice. Tony was amazed. It told *him* to take the ball. His nerves were steady, however, his wits taut. He disregarded Bernie Crouch. As a personal equation he had ceased to exist. He was merely a factor of the game, like a piece on a chessboard. Curious, like a coincidence, that this very first play should have sent Tony Wickham plunging like a thunderbolt straight at Bernie Crouch.

It was an unsupported thrust, for the interference was flung into disorder, but nothing short of a stone wall could have checked the midshipman's onset. Head down, ball clamped tight, he was one hundred and eighty pounds of wickedly concentrated energy. He was perfectly willing to break his neck if by so doing he could carry that ball ahead.

What happened to Bernie Crouch was difficult to discover. He had been taken unawares. Of this there was no doubt. That this negligible Tony Wickham, who had never played for the Navy, should attempt to smash through *him* was a glaring impertinence. At least, this is what his demeanor suggested when he ceased reclining upon the back of his neck.

'Wow!' grunted Anthony Wickham as he rolled over and bounded to his feet. 'Four yards to the good. Now what the dickens ever made me afraid of *him?*'

Again he paid no heed to the hostile intentions of Bernie Crouch. The signal was for Wickham again, this time off the other tackle. They were using him as a half back. There flashed into his mind the achievement of David Magowan, the 'has-been,' in battering his way through the line during that famous afternoon on Farragut Field.

It was inspiring beyond words. Were they going to give him the chance to attempt something like that? It was incredible.

David Magowan could have hit the line no harder in his redoubtable youth than did his powerful nephew when he charged ahead again. He made his gain, but would they let him try it again? He *knew* that nothing could stop him or hurl him back. Yellow? A coward? A quitter? He would show that dumb-bell of a coach.

Yes, it was Wickham again, straight through between center and guard, just as Dave Magowan had done in practice. Breathless and dizzy, Tony was helped to his feet and hurled against West Point for the fourth time. He had gained another first down and the enemy had devised no means of checking him. With grim delight he heard the signal which would once more send him careering into Bernie Crouch. This Army tackle had a reputation, did he? Well, he was due to have a few holes shot in it.

Tony made good his boast by tearing off five yards through the invincible Kensington twin. To the weary Navy team the performance was like a miracle. It came at the right time to put fresh heart into them, to pull them together for a supreme effort. It was like discovering an un-

suspected resource. They had begun to lose faith in their ability to score. The repeated and sustained advances had been terribly fatiguing. They lacked just that quality of flaming energy which Tony Wickham had supplied. He had assumed the leadership.

The captain called them together for a minute's conference.

'Can you torpedo them again, Tony?' he panted.

'I'll try,' was the proper Navy reply. 'Turn me loose at Bernie Crouch and I think I can make another first down.'

Presently he repeated this remark to Bernie himself. The Kensington twin eyed his adversary with respect and there was no malice on his square-hewn, honest features as he said:

'Treat 'em rough, eh, Tony? It's lucky for me they held you back ever since plebe year. This is some surprise party.'

'More of it coming,' said Tony.

Thus did Midshipman Wickham, the castoff, carry the ball down the field until it rested no more than twelve yards from the last line of defense. He was an unexpected weapon of attack which the Army had made no preparation to parry. In order to meet these shock tactics the

Army had narrowed its fighting front, drawing in the wings of the line. Even then it had been impossible to thwart Wickham's crashing advances.

And now, with the Army team more or less massed to hold in the last ditch, the flanks were insecurely guarded. The Navy quarter back piped a signal. Wickham jumped as if to attempt another drive off tackle. It was a feint. The swift little quarter back kept tight hold of the ball instead of passing it. He scudded for the left end of the interlocked rush lines. The deception permitted him to get under way unmolested. He ran as though death snapped at his heels. He was no more than a muddy streak moving toward an objective of enormous importance in his young life.

For once the Army backs were caught napping. The little quarter back scuttled around or between them like a greased pig at a country fair. Two or three of these frantic zigzags and he slid on his stomach behind the goal posts.

A touchdown for the Navy and handsomely earned!

The elusive quarter back was the hero of the multitude, the idol of twenty-four hundred delirious midshipmen. Their excitement obscured the part played by Tony Wickham in this great

climax. He was no more sensational than the other men who had helped to gain ground again and again, only to lose the advantage. This was the hasty verdict of those who did not understand. There was room in their heads for one idea, that the prodigious little quarter back had turned the tide.

The West Point coaching staff was too resourceful to be outmaneuvered more than once in this flagrant manner. The scheme of defense was readjusted to take particular care of the objectionable Wickham. The contest swung into the final quarter and the fortune of war so ordered it that the score still stood:

Navy — 7. Army — 0.

And thus, as it finally turned out, the great day ended, a day in which there was honor in defeat as well as glory in the victory. Tony Wickham was both jubilant and morose. He felt no yearnings to be a hero, but he still smarted from the insults of the coach who had thrown him into the game as a makeshift. Apparently the intention had been to batter him to pieces in bucking the line and then to take him out again. Well, he had fooled them there.

He studiously avoided 'Pop' Farwell until the latter gentleman invaded his room at the hotel

shortly before dinner. Tony's manner was far from cordial.

'I have played my last football at the Academy,' said he, 'and now I can tell you what I think of you.'

'Delighted!' grinned the lean, cynical coach. 'No language is bad enough. Set your sight and shoot. However, Tony, before you really get going good, let me say a few things, will you? Why, you poor dumb fish, I have known for the last month or more that you were game to the core. You thought I was as wooden as you are, I suppose. What do you think I get paid a salary for, to go to sleep on my feet?'

The midshipman's jaw dropped. He looked as foolish as a plebe. More insults, but these were of a very different kind. He could overlook any amount of them.

'For the love of Mike,' he implored, 'say it again, Pop. And what is the answer?'

The coach tapped his forehead with an eloquent finger. The gesture conveyed a modest appreciation of his superior sagacity.

'I outguessed the Army,' he divulged, with a grin even wider. 'They never dreamed I thought of sending you into the game and they had no line on you, understand? *I knew.* Haven't I been

watching you day after day? You were not a bit like last season or the year before, Tony. For a while I had no faith in you. As I told Doug Knapp, once bitten, twice shy. Something happened to pull you together. Maybe it was Dave Magowan. He is a snappy uncle to live in the same yard with.'

'Perhaps it was, Pop,' said Tony, eager to hear more. 'But you did give me a dirty deal. I don't savvy that yet.'

'I wanted to beat the Army,' explained 'Pop' Farwell. 'To hold you back under cover, to pick just the right moment to shove you in, and fighting mad at that, was the best I had up my sleeve. I was hoping and praying you might slam through in Dave Magowan's style. It was a winning bet.'

'It helped, but it didn't win the game,' protested Tony Wickham.

'It won, I tell you!' exclaimed the coach. 'There was no other way in the world to score. The Navy team was going dead. It had tried to do too much. When you whirled in there and went staving through the Army line, it put every last man on his toes again. It set them on fire, Tony. Nothing could stop them. Talk about your psychological moment! That was it. Do I make myself clear or do you need a blackboard

and diagrams? And will you shake hands with a man who admires you? Next to winning the game the finest thing in this whole football season has been the way you stood the gaff and came through like an officer and a gentleman.'

THE END

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MIDSHIPMAN WICKHAM

By RALPH D. PAINE